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Chrono Trigger • Suikoden: Tierkreis

235
DECEMBER 2008
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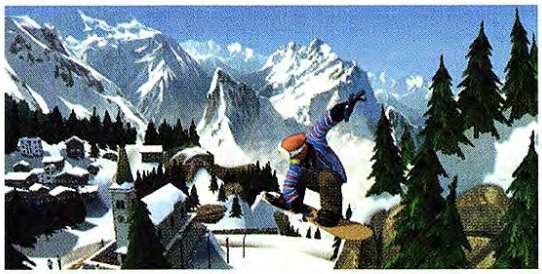

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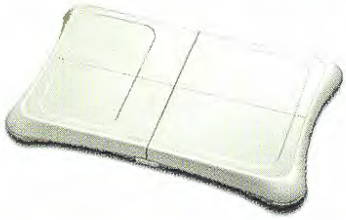

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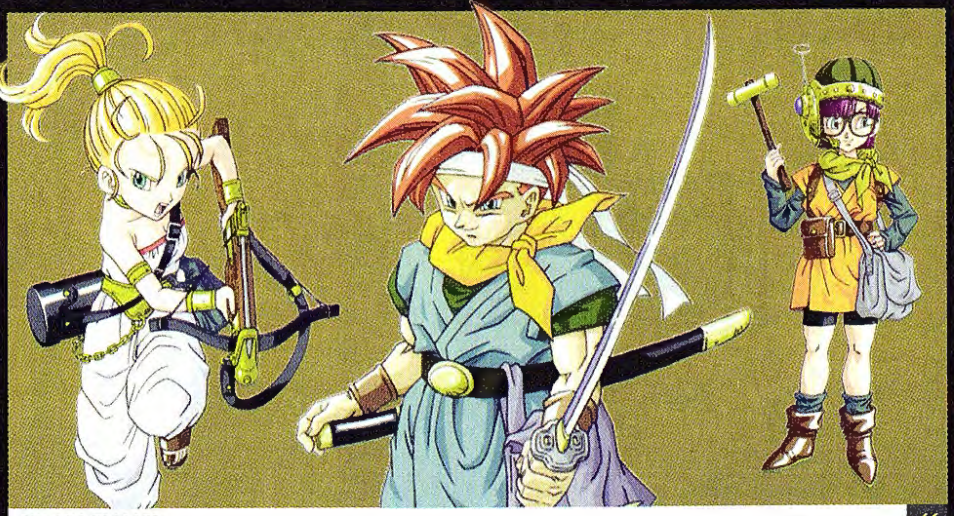

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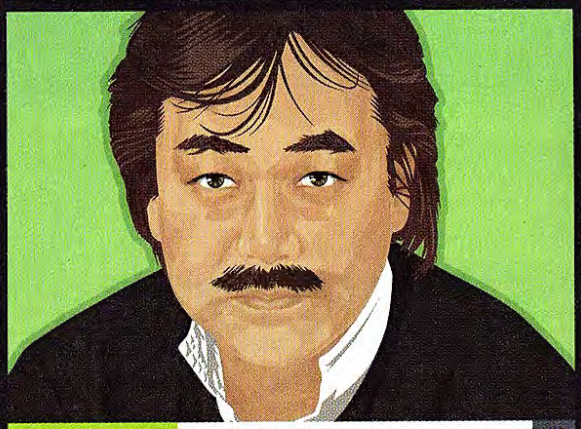

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DS = NINTENDO DS
NES = NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
VC = VIRTUAL CONSOLE
Wii = Wii
WW = WiiWare

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Pulse

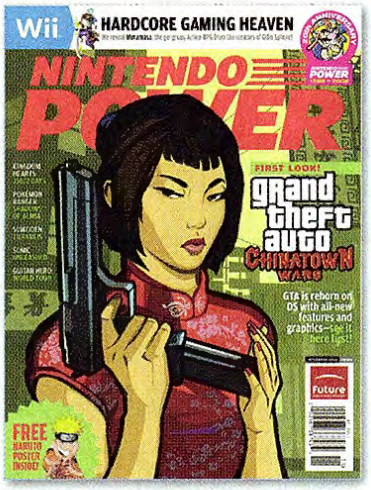
Our First Year

This issue marks Future's first full year as Nintendo Power's new publisher—time really does fly when you're having fun! It was a year that we spent learning about the magazine, working hard, and pinching ourselves—I'm a lifelong fan of Nintendo and NP and it still feels surreal to read my own words on these hallowed pages.

Here are two of the most valuble things I've learned during my first 365 days on the job: First, you can endlessly rag on the Zelda and Mario games for the failed Philips CD-i console and no one will ever complain. And second, Nintendo fans come in four general types: core gamers, casual players, those who bake Mario cakes, and those with Zelda tattoos.

Thanks for giving us new guys a chance, and for the many words of support all year. Meeting so many of you at our recent 20th Anniversary party in New York was the perfect way to bring these first 12 months to a close.

CHRIS SLATE EDITOR IN CHIEF



Chris Slate here, back once again to answer your letters. We've tidied up the place a bit this month—a little more style, a little less clutter. The changes are small, but we hope they will make this section more enjoyable to read. Now, to business: we've read through hundreds of your letters since last issue, and these are the lucky ones that made it into the magazine. Enjoy!

LETTERS

I HEART KINGDOM HEARTS...A LOT

The moment I saw the coverage of Kingdom Hearts 358/2 Days in your last issue, I screamed. Loudly. My mom said that it sounded like I'd found a dead body. As a way-too-obsessed fangirl of the Kingdom Hearts series (and Organization XIII, to be specific), I was overjoyed to read about this game...until I saw that it still hadn't been confirmed for a US release. Dudes of Power, if it ends up being a Japan-only thing (like KHII: Final Mix+), I will be just one of the thousands of fangirls protesting.

—(NO NAME GIVEN)

We're still waiting for a US release to be confirmed, but the chances of it coming here seem very good. While we're waiting, I think I'll change my business cards to read, "Chris Slate, Dude of Power"—that's way cooler than Editor in Chief!

YELLING AT YOUR TV

There are *so* many potential ways to use the new WiiSpeak microphone! You could call out spells in a Harry Potter game, shout your attacks in Pokémon battles, or even use the peripheral with new WarioWare minigames!

—BRAWLFAN

Don't forget shouting, "Objection!" as Phoenix Wright!

WEAR YOUR GREEN CAP WITH PRIDE

I'm writing in response to Meta Knight's letter in Vol. 234—you go, girl! When I went to middle school you either thought video games were lame, or you were a PlayStation2/Xbox fanboy. Therefore, I—being not only a Nintendo fan, but a girl—got picked on mercilessly. Fortunately, I met like-minded folk later on in high school, so don't give up! I have plenty of gamer girlfriends now. (And boys, too! My boyfriend and I play Pokémon together.) I applaud your courage to dress up as Link; I would have totally chickened out.

—REBECCA L.

I have never written to Pulse during my 10 years of subscribing, but the minute I read Meta Knight's letter, I went straight to my computer. Meta Knight, don't listen to anybody who calls you names! I've always wanted to make cool video game costumes, but I've come up with a bunch of dumb reasons not to, including what other people would think. For every person who calls you a nerd, there are a hundred people like me who say you're awesome, and wish they had your courage. Cosplay on, sister! The *real* fans are with you!

—A LINK PAST HIS PRIME

In this case, Meta Knight, I love being able to say "I told you so." There are a lot more like-minded people out there than you might realize, so try not to worry about what a few rude kids might think.

Thanks for turning me onto Avalon Code with your feature in Vol. 234; I love playing RPGs on my DS, and this one looks pretty innovative. Everyone eventually hears about the really big games, but I subscribe to Nintendo Power to learn about lesser-known gems like this one. Keep 'em coming!
—KENNY K.

LIVE BY THE CODE, DIE BY THE CODE

REVIEWING REVIEWS

Do people really need game reviews? Think about it—you can pretty much tell whether a game is good or not by how much it costs.

As an example, let's compare two Wii games in price and quality: Super Mario Galaxy and George of the Jungle. Galaxy was the 2007 Game of the Year, and you didn't even bother reviewing George of the Jungle. A used copy of Galaxy sells at GameStop for at least $45, while George of the Jungle goes for around $15. See the difference? I mean, don't get me wrong, reviews are one of my favorite parts of the Nintendo Power, but sometimes the game prices speak for themselves. **—HYPO PROWER**

It's true that a higher resale value might indicate a more popular game, but not all big sellers are right for all kinds of players. And how would you pick from new, full-priced games, or find titles that are fun but never caught on?

MAGAZINES...FROM THE FUTURE!

I just got my November issue in September! How can you guys manage to get me my copies that fast? It's going to get confusing when the games you review might have been released a month or two ago. **—MATTHEW P.**

No need to worry, Matthew. As with many magazines, our issue dates run about a month ahead, but our content is timely.

C'MON, GUYS

I am one of the hardest people to beat at every game tournament I go to, but I never get respect from male gamers just because I'm a girl. The guys say it's because I like games like Harvest Moon. How can I get more respect without having to play violent games? **—CLAIRE W.**

If they're not losers, they'll appreciate talent when they see it. If they don't, just kick their butts and brush them aside.

At the 20th Anniversary party, NP fans like Merri-Lee lined up to meet us—can you believe it? Thanks for making us goofballs feel like rockstars!

PARTY PEOPLE

There are many of us who have been along for NP's entire 20-year ride, and a lucky few of us were able to join you in New York for the big celebration. It was a great party and well worth the hours we waited for those doors to open! It was an honor to meet the current staff, who hold the future of our favorite magazine in their hearts and hands.

As we were planning our trip, we knew we needed to bring an issue of Nintendo Power with each of us to get in the door, and we thought, "What better issues to bring than the first and second?" They actually belong to my mother, who is probably your very first "Nintendo Grammy." She was a grandmother before any of the Nintendo systems hit store shelves and was instantly hooked when they did. Her favorite game is still the original Legend of Zelda; she's currently playing through it again on Virtual Console. Mom was even an original Nintendo Fun Club member. She would have been at the party, but health issues kept her from making the trip.

Thank you for a great day, and for taking the time to take photos! We're looking forward to the next 20 years! **—MERRI-LEE S.**

I'm glad you could make it, and I hope your mom is feeling better. Thanks to everyone who sent in kind words about the party—we're so glad you enjoyed it!

FOX McWHERE?

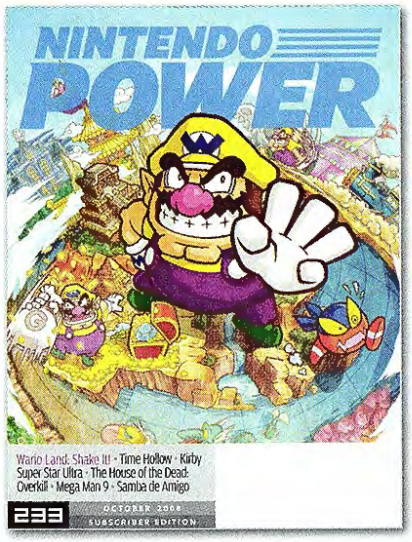
The biggest hole in the Wii lineup is the absence of a Star Fox game. The series would advance greatly with Wii features (just think: the Wii remote *is* your Arwing!). The Wii online experience could be brought to new heights with massive confrontations and stat tracking, which would coincide beautifully with the new WiiSpeak and Wii MotionPlus accessories (one-to-one ship control and online voice chat!). **—STAR FOX FAN**

I'm right there with you, as long as it plays more like Star Fox 64 than...well, all of the series' other games. Fox McCloud really got it right on the N64!

CHICKENS' WEAKNESS FINALLY FOUND

A couple of letters in Pulse have stated that the chickens in Zelda games are invincible, but a while ago I found out that you can kill them with the Fire Rod in The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening. As for Link being a vegetarian (as another reader suggested), Link eats hearts and fish soup in The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess. **—(NO NAME GIVEN)**

You...you cold-hearted fiend.... They were just chickens, man—chickens! With their whole lives ahead of them! Even Ganon wasn't vile enough to go after poor, defenseless poultry!



I absolutely love the Subscriber's Edition idea, and I can't wait to see what future covers look like. The issue that you guys started with wasn't the best (if you had done this with the previous month's Wario Land: Shake It! cover, that would have been cool), but I give you props for starting this trend.
—(NO NAME GIVEN)

Glad you liked it! And since you brought it up, here's what that Wario Land: Shake It! cover would've looked like with the Subscriber Edition treatment. We received many responses to the new style and they were overwhelmingly positive. Looks like we've got a winner!

GETTING THE RETRO TREATMENT

It would be amazing if Ed Boon and John Tobias—the original creators of Mortal Kombat—reunited to develop a prequel to MK 1. There is a lot of story potential there. We never learned much about the original Kung Lao, and we could get the original Goro and Shang Tsung back! I'd keep it simple with just eight or nine characters with two original Fatalities each—no Friendships, Babalities, Brutalities, etc. And render the characters using images of real people like they did with MK 1, 2, and 3! There's nothing wrong with a little 2-D action as long as the graphics are as detailed as they were during the original trilogy. Keep it simple...but make it fresh! **—OLD SCHOOL MK FAN**

It would be awesome to have a new game in the style of Square's Super NES RPGs. Final Fantasy II, Final Fantasy III, and Chrono Trigger are some of my all-time favorite games. They led to many sleep-deprived nights because I loved replaying them and discovering new things every time. **—MIKE**

Both of those ideas sound great! Now that the retrolicious Mega Man 9 is out, I can't stop dreaming about (and drooling over) more new 8- and 16-bit games!

MERRY MUSIC MAKERS

This is a response to H-WII64's letter in Vol. 234. I, too, enjoy and like to play music from video games. I have an ocarina and can play the *Song of Time* and *Zelda's Lullaby* on it, and my friend can play many Zelda tunes on the piano. One of the reasons I love Super Smash Bros. Brawl is its wide selection of original and remastered Nintendo pieces that stretch all the way back to the 8-bit era.

I just wanted to make it known that there are more people who understand that it's fun to play music from video games.
—(NO NAME GIVEN)

Hear! Hear! Good music is all in the eye—er, ear—of the beholder.

SAMUS, SMACK HIM

I love Nintendo, but when will they come out with a good first-person shooter? By the way, I haven't tried Metroid Prime 3 yet. **—KEVIN G.**

Step 1: buy Metroid Prime 3. Step 2: enjoy. Medal of Honor Heroes 2 is also good, and look out for The Conduit sometime next year.

COUNTRY FAN

Bring back Donkey Kong Country! After the three Super NES installments of the side-scrolling series were released, the experience was lost—on N64 they made the game in 3-D, and on GameCube they totally changed things with the DK Bongos. Those later games were enjoyable, but none of them offered the same kind of side-scrolling fun as the DKC trilogy. I would love to see a brand-new Donkey Kong Country adventure.
—SONNY GANDHI

Personally, I'd vote for another game like 1994's Donkey Kong revamp for Game Boy—original DK arcade action mixed with plenty of great puzzles—a classic!

ROUNDHOUSE KICK

Why isn't there a Chuck Norris game? It would be awesome! Chuck should have at least been unlockable in Super Smash Bros. Brawl. Wii Sports, Wii Play, Wii Music, Wii Chuck Norris—see? He would fit right in. **—JARED H.**

You don't play with Chuck Norris without losing an eye or a limb.

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Understand that the magazine staff is separate from Nintendo; we don't make the games.

Don't send links to game coverage on the Web—trust us; we see it all.

Don't ask about the status of upcoming games, or whether certain games will be announced; if we have that info, we'll always tell you.

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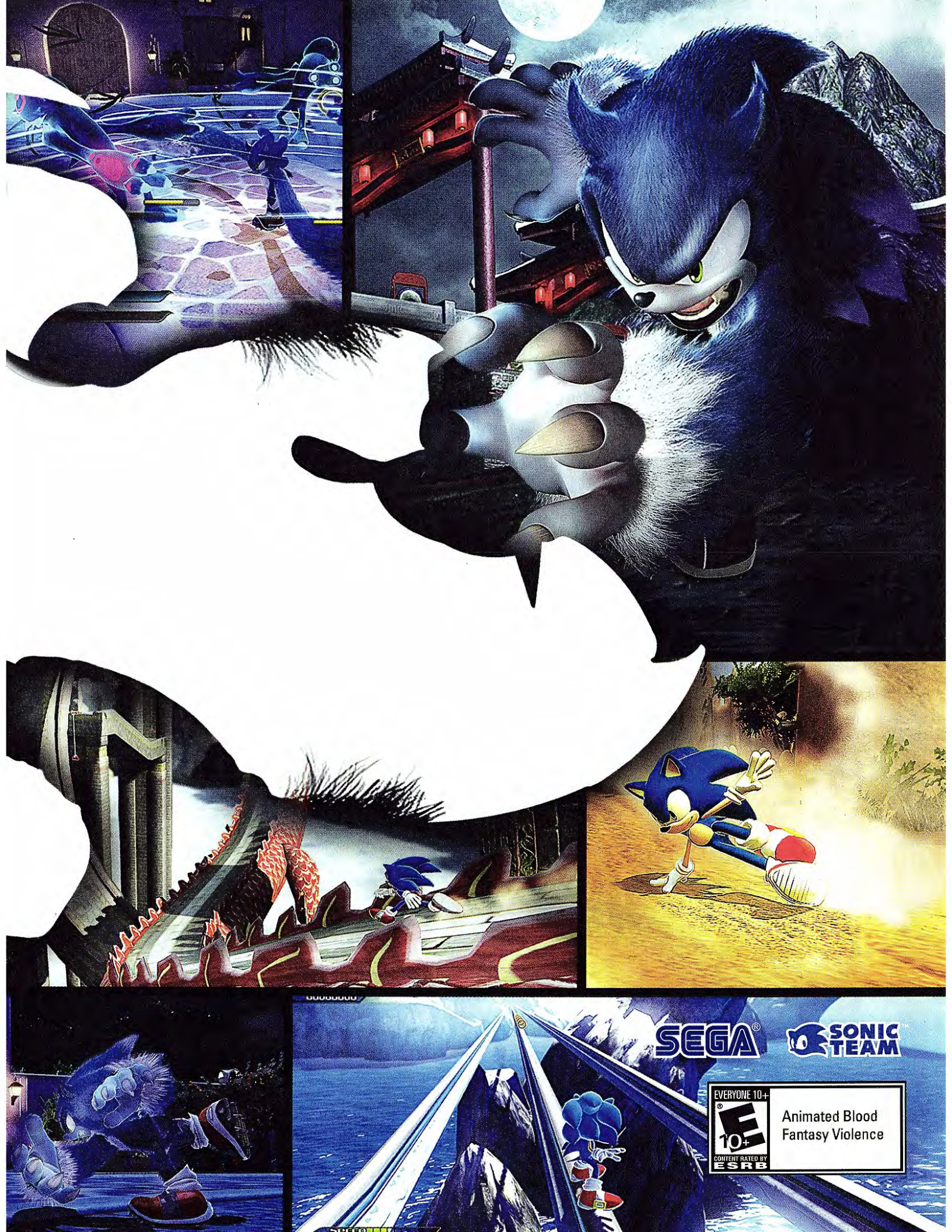
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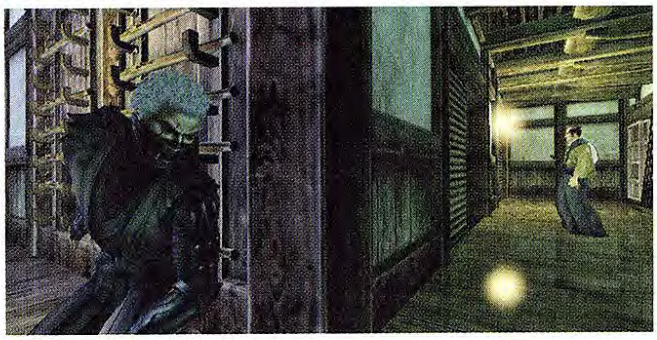
Animated Blood
Fantasy Violence

DS GOES TO RPG HEAVEN

THE WORLD ENDS WITH SEGA

DISASTER'S DAY ARRIVES

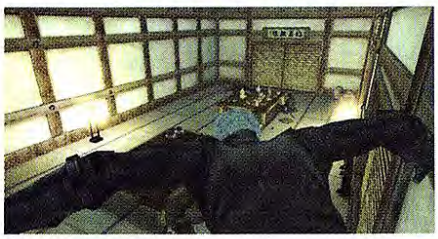


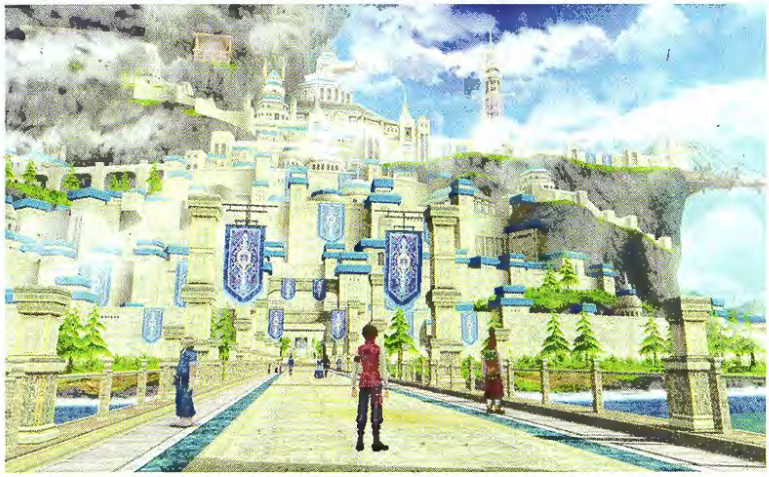
Ninja Espionage Action

Wii owners, prepare to learn the way of the ninja. Tenchu 4 sneaks up on North America early next year.

Though Metal Gear Solid gets most of the credit for popularizing the modern stealth genre (and deservedly so), the original Tenchu actually beat it to market by a couple of months. The game, which had players sneaking through feudal Japan as one of two ninja assassins, was both a critical and commercial success, spawning numerous follow-ups across multiple platforms. Now the latest installment—Tenchu 4—is headed exclusively to Wii courtesy of Ubisoft. Even better news is that Acquire, the studio that created the series, is handling development duties for the first time since 2000. Though the franchise has remained popular, especially in Japan, most agree that its quality has suffered in the hands of other developers. (Let's not even talk about the dreadful DS game.) With Acquire back at the helm, we're optimistic for a return to form.

Gameplay details remain scarce, unfortunately, but we know that the focus on stealth remains and that series mainstays Rikimaru and Ayame return as playable characters. Ubisoft promises more than 10 missions and 50 side quests, and says players will use the Wii remote to simulate the sundry deeds expected of a ninja (throwing shuriken, swinging a katana, etc.). Tenchu 4 is currently slated for an early 2009 release. Look for more details and full hands-on impressions in next month's issue. —**STEVE T.**





Fantasia Rising

It's official—XSEED has snagged Marvelous Entertainment's eye-popping new Wii fantasy RPG for a summer '09 North American release.

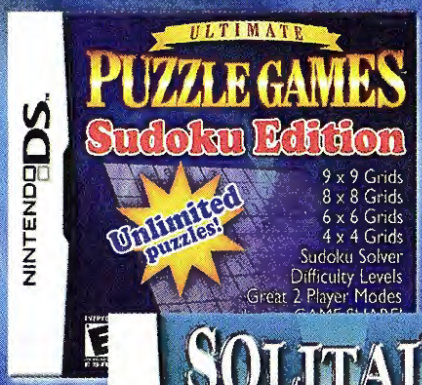
From Dragon Quest to Dungeons & Dragons, nothing captures the high-fantasy flavor of a traditional RPG like a proud and majestic dragon. But the winged beasts that soar the skies of Arc Rise Fantasia's Fulheim are a much fouler sort; they're overbreeding, poisoning the air, and causing large-scale environmental collapse everywhere they tread. Despite the regal air and vivid, colorful beauty of the game world, there's something truly nasty lurking just beyond its clouds.

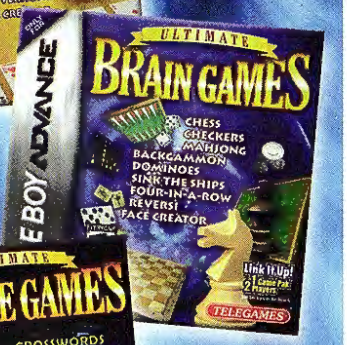
It will take a coalition of snappily dressed youths—including a prince, a rogue, a busty pistolera, a mercenary with a heart of gold, and of course, a beautiful young girl of mysterious origins—to save the kingdom from this growing menace. The game's "trinity battle system" allows you to choose which three characters you'll fight with, and your chosen trio will grow tighter as a team the more they fight together, unlocking tandem attacks and other combat bonuses.

Arc Rise Fantasia is the first console game developed by ImageEpoch, the creators of the Luminous Arc series and the upcoming DS title World Destruction. The team includes veterans of Namco Tales Studio, and that heritage shows through with an emphasis on strong characters, a vast 3-D world map, and enemies that appear on the field instead of yanking you into abrupt random encounters. But Arc Rise Fantasia has plenty of new ideas as well, including a turn-based battle system packed with strategy-RPG elements, a system of magic based around crystallized light that rains from the sky, and summonable creatures that hang around to chat after mopping up on the battlefield.

Arc Rise Fantasia may be the most ambitious RPG ever announced for Wii, and we're eager to see if ImageEpoch can truly pull it off. Check back next month for hands-on impressions from the upcoming Tokyo Game Show. —CASEY L.

FAMILY PLAYTIME





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NEWS FROM JAPAN

Dream Teams Rock the Dual Screens

It's a month of surprising collaborations as Japanese studios assemble big-name talent to helm high-profile DS RPGs.

It's been a banner year for portable RPG fans, and the recent flood of original titles shows no signs of receding. In September alone, Japanese DS owners saw the announcement of four promising titles from high-profile developers.

Sega was one of the first companies to make a high-budget, original RPG for the DS: the North America-bound World Destruction. (See page 16.) Not content to stop there, Sega celebrated the title's Japanese release by announcing new DS RPGs every week for three weeks straight. (Though no announcements have been made, all three titles are likely candidates for a North American release.) First to the plate was Shining Force Feather, a new Shining Force entry that mercifully abandons the real-time action of recent PlayStation 2 installments and returns the series to its strategic roots. The title is being helmed by Flight-Plan, the developers of the Summon Night series.

Next up was Phantasy Star Zero, a direct sequel (or prequel?) to the Dreamcast classic Phantasy Star Online. The developers promise both an original single-player adventure and plenty of four-player quests over local wireless and Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection. The gameplay unfolds on the upper screen while players use the touch screen to switch skills, check maps, and—coolest of all—write or draw messages to their party. As an added tip of the hat to longtime Sega RPG fans, the game's original characters and 14 character classes have been redrawn by Toshiyuki Kubooka of Lunar-series fame.

The names of more RPG legends surfaced the following week, when Sega announced 7th Dragon. This original RPG is the long-awaited follow-up from Kazuya Niino, who left Atlus after creating the original Etrian Odyssey. He apparently found a kindred spirit in Sega producer Rieko Kodama, who helmed Skies of Arcadia and cocreated the Phantasy Star series. The legendary Yuzo Koshiro will be handling the tunes.

SHINING FORCE FEATHER

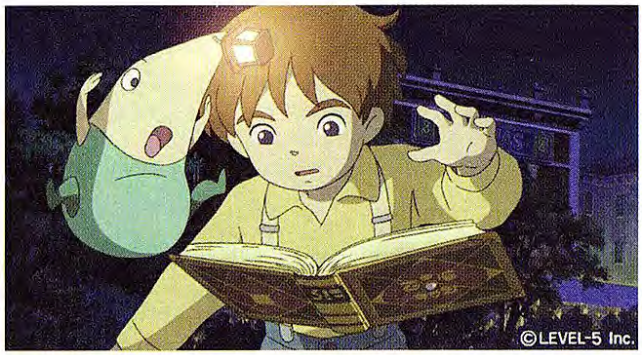
Niino promises that 7th Dragon will feature many of the concepts that made Etrian Odyssey great, including tough battles and a deep character-creation system. But while that title owed its old-school flavor to classic PC titles such as Wizardry and Might and Magic, 7th Dragon borrows the aesthetic of 8- and 16-bit RPGs, with an overhead perspective and a train of party members following their leader. 7th Dragon uses a mix of hand-animated heroes and 3-D monsters in combat scenes, where characters run onto the battlefield to attack their foes in the style of the latter Phantasy Star games.

Sega's impressive slate of announcements had to share the spotlight with upstart publisher Level-5's "vision conference," where they announced a dozen new games, with DS title Ni no Kuni: The Another World as the topper. What makes Ni no Kuni so shocking is the collaboration with Studio Ghibli, the legendary animation studio behind *My Neighbor Totoro* and *Spirited Away*. Studio Ghibli has turned down every previous offer of collaboration with video-game publishers, and has never allowed a game adaptation of any of its wildly popular films. But for whatever reason, the studio is on board with this one, and will be handling the game's original animation while frequent collaborator Joe Hisaishi works on the soundtrack.

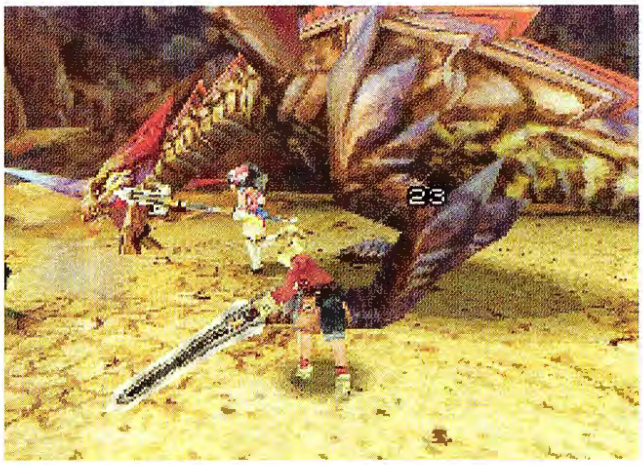
Ni no Kuni puts the player in the role of a 13-year-old boy who was inadvertently responsible for his own mother's death. The game begins with a fairy appearing before the boy, handing him a magical tome, and inviting him to visit a parallel world where he just might find a way to save his mother. The game box will include a printed copy of that tome, which players will need to scour for magical formulas and tips on how to survive the game's perils. Like the Sega games, Ni no Kuni has not been announced for North America, but it seems like a good fit.

This new flood of RPGs will begin with the Christmas Day release of Phantasy Star Zero in Japan and continue throughout 2009.

—CASEY L.



NI NO KUNI: THE ANOTHER WORLD



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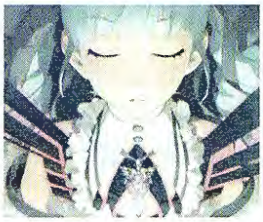
Shadow Wars

Unleash your inner shadow spirit in Ignition Entertainment's Blue Dragon Plus.

Blue Dragon was the first game Hironobu Sakaguchi made after leaving Square Enix, and it grew rapidly from an Xbox 360 RPG into an international media empire. With the anime series enjoying a successful run on the Cartoon Network, Ignition Entertainment has picked up the series' first DS game, Blue Dragon Plus, for a North American release in March of '09.

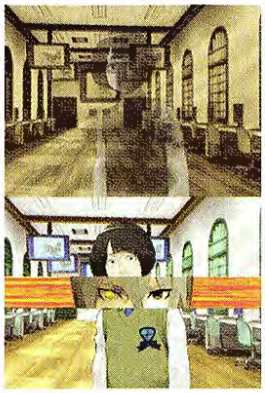
A real-time strategy game similar to Heroes of Mana (which was made by Brownie Brown, one of this title's developers), Blue Dragon Plus stars an army of 16 heroes who fight with personal shadow spirits that take the form of dragons, phoenixes, and minotaurs. The game is a direct sequel to the Xbox 360 original, and features similar production values, including nearly an hour of prerendered CG event scenes and a soundtrack by Final Fantasy composer Nobuo Uematsu. —CASEY L.

We want a personal shadow spirit that takes the form of pie.



Feel the Pain

The DS is home to a number of point-and-click adventure games, but perhaps none as unusual as Ignition Entertainment's Lux-Pain. Coming in March 2009, the anime-inspired game is set in city where a parasitic worm called Silent is infecting human beings and causing them to commit horrendous crimes. As protagonist Atsuki—who gains a power called Lux-Pain—you must stop them by examining objects, conversing with characters, conducting autopsies, and more.



A World Not Worth Saving

Sega and ImageEpoch's first collaboration—World Destruction—turns the tables on a classic RPG tale.

Morte Ashera may look like any other spunky RPG heroine, but instead of trying to save her tormented world, she's attempting to annihilate it. With humanity enslaved by beastfolk, it's a sorry existence for sure, but not everyone shares her faith that a better life is waiting at the other side of oblivion.

Morte's quest for the "destruct code" will take her to distant corners of her harsh and beautiful desert world, where she and her companions will fight all manner of beasts in vertical battles that span both screens of the DS. You can customize your characters with everything from hand-tuned combos to special battle cries that boost their stats in the heat of combat.

With its smooth isometric graphics and an impressive staff of developers that includes Chrono-series writer Masato Kato and composer Yasunori Mitsuda, Sega's journey of World Destruction promises to be a memorable one indeed. But don't pack your bags quite yet—the game won't be heading our way until the fall of '09. —CASEY L.

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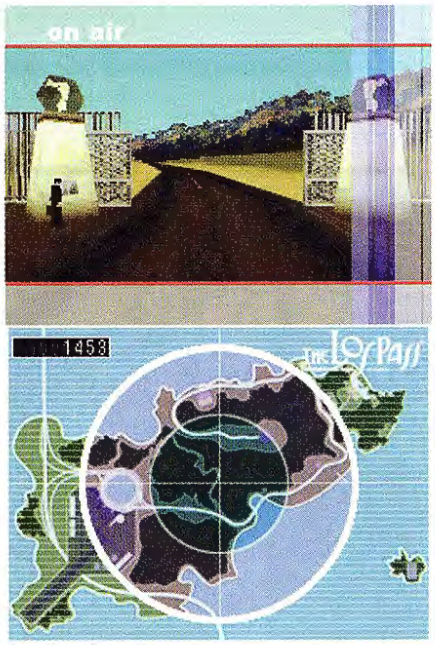
Weather Report

The forecast calls for Flower, Sun, and Rain on DS, a North American translation of Suda51's Japanese PlayStation 2 mystery adventure.

With a plot that sounds like a mix of *Groundhog Day* and *24*, and auteur Suda51 at the helm, Flower, Sun, and Rain, from Marvelous Entertainment USA and XSEED Games, is sure to pique gamers' interests. In the game, "searcher" Sumio Mondo is living the same day over and over again in tropical island resort Flower, Sun, and Rain until he can stop a massive, day-ending explosion. By connecting to the minds of the island's residents with his computer, Catherine, Mondo solves 18 mystery-laden scenarios, each one bringing him closer to defusing the bomb. Much of his detective work involves using gathered information to crack codes on his computer, allowing him to track down lost items. The characters and quirky situations that have made the original PlayStation 2 title a sought-after import are intact, and there are 50 new touch-controlled puzzles that are exclusive to the DS version. The game is expected to reach our shores in March. –**GEORGE S.**



Fresh Powder

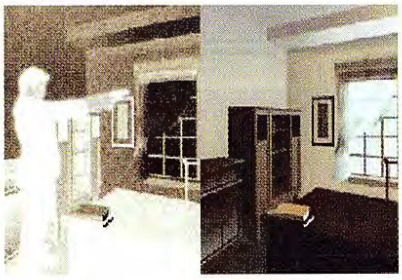
Namco Bandai shreds some snow once again with the Wii-exclusive We Ski and Snowboard.

Earlier this year, Namco Bandai had gamers hitting the slopes with its easy-to-play skiing game We Ski. The company is taking that basic idea one step further for the sequel by adding snowboards to the mix in the appropriately (and tentatively) titled We Ski and Snowboard. You can snowboard both regular- and goofy-footed, and the game features new areas that are ideal for snowboarding, such as half-pipes. Skiers aren't left out, however, thanks to tweaks to the established gameplay: there's trick skiing (so you can ski backwards, for example), as well as the ability to jump and do tricks anywhere (instead of only being able to jump off specific ramps as in the first game). With two mountains to explore in this game, you've got plenty of opportunities to perform impressive tricks—which you can rewatch in replays at any time. –**JUSTIN C.**

Déjà Vu All Over Again

The makers of Hotel Dusk look to the past (and present) for their next innovative DS adventure game.

CING, the development team responsible for unique DS adventure games Trace Memory and Hotel Dusk: Room 215, is at it once more—this time teaming with publisher Tecmo on a graphic-text adventure game titled Again: Eye of Providence. Like in CING's previous games, Again is full of mysteries and dabbles in the paranormal, and you play the game by holding the DS sideways like a book. The story revolves around FBI agent Jonathan Weaver and his investigation of the Providence Murder Cases—a bizarre series of unsolved crimes that took Jonathan's family from him 18 years ago. Now the deaths have begun again, so it's up to you to crack the case by using "past vision" powers; by examining evidence on the touch screen you'll be able to view the past and present separately on the DS's two screens, allowing you to compare the scenes and uncover more clues. The mystery unfolds in spring 2009. –**CHRIS H.**



What's Cooking?

What's Cooking? is more than just a game, it's Jamie Oliver's complete guide to helping you and your kids prepare and create fabulous food virtually on your Nintendo DS and at home in your kitchen. With 100 of Jamie's delicious recipes, a clever shopping list function and Jamie with you every step of the way, cooking has never been so much fun!

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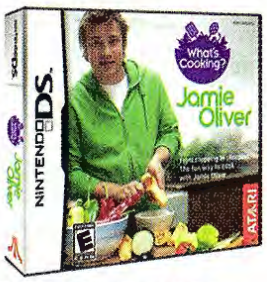

EXCLUSIVELY FOR NINTENDO DS™

What's Cooking? Jamie Oliver

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Rocking Mad

Complete your virtual band with Mad Catz's officially licensed **Rock Band 2** peripherals.

Mad Catz's accessories haven't always been of the highest quality, but that's all in the past: the company has become an officially licensed manufacturer, and is working closely with Rock Band 2 developer Harmonix to make high-quality products to enhance your Rock Band 2 experience.

Take the bass guitar, for instance. It's more than just a regular Rock Band guitar with a new shell; it has a thumb rest and a split strum bar so you can play by plucking the strum bar with your index and middle fingers, just like you would with a real bass guitar. Mad Catz is also making cymbals for your drum kit; you can hit them instead of the yellow, blue, and green drum pads (Rock Band 2 recognizes those as cymbals in Free Play mode, however). You can also look forward to portable drums that can be set up on pretty much any flat surface. **–JUSTIN C.**

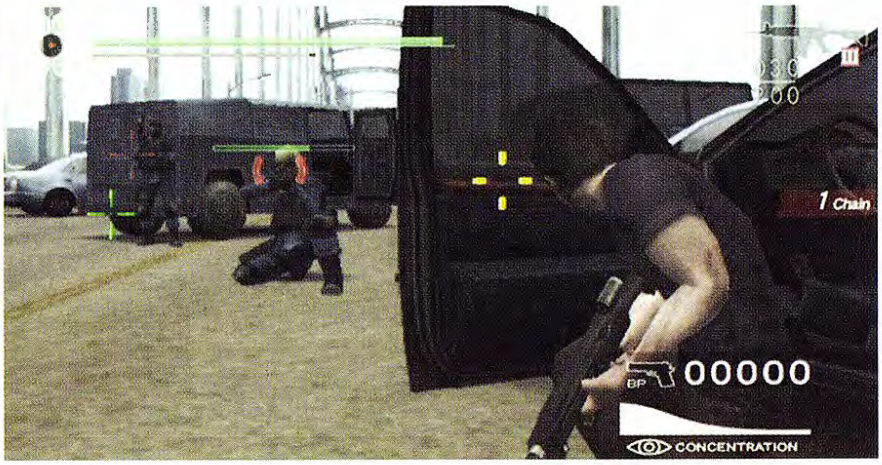
NEWS FROM JAPAN

Disaster Hits Japan

Monolith Soft brings the fun back to calamity as **Disaster: Day of Crisis** unexpectedly materializes on the other side of the Pacific.

One of the first Wii titles ever revealed way back during E3 2006, Disaster: Day of Crisis fell off the radar in recent months. But just as we began to wonder if the intriguing survival-adventure would ever see the light of day, the finished game abruptly appeared on Japanese store shelves. Garnering mostly positive reviews, the much-delayed project from developer Monolith Soft (Xenosaga, Baten Kaitos) certainly delivers on its title; players face seemingly every catastrophe imaginable, from earthquakes to floods to the number-one threat facing civilization: bear attacks. These cataclysmic events are witnessed from the perspective of Raymond Bryce, a former search-and-rescue worker who left the vocation after his partner Steve died during a volcanic eruption. When Ray learns that Steve's only sister has been taken hostage amid the chaos, he braves the widespread destruction in an attempt to rescue her.

Ray's journey blends a wide assortment of gameplay styles; one moment you'll be using the Wii remote and nunchuk like a defibrillator, and the next you'll wield the controller like a light gun to mow down terrorists. Disaster: Day of Crisis should be available in Europe by the time you read this, but as we go to print, there's no word on a North American release. **–STEVE T.**



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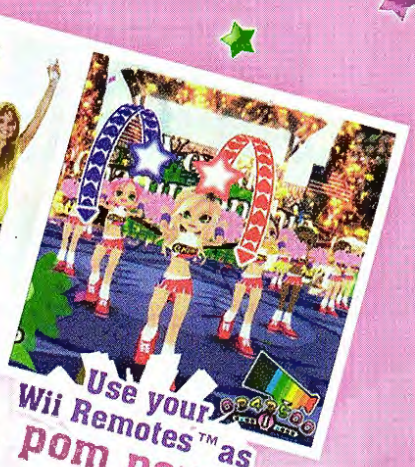

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GAME WATCH FORECAST

Wii		
Animal Crossing: City Folk	Nintendo	WIN 08
Arc Rise Fantasia	Marvelous Entertainment USA/XSEED	SUM 09
Bolt	Disney	11/08
Brave: A Warrior's Tale	SouthPeak	TBA
Cake Mania: In the Mix!	Majesco	FALL 09
Call of Duty: World at War	Activision	11/08
Castlevania Judgment	Konami	11/08
Catch of the Day	Electronic Arts	TBA
The Conduit	TBA	TBA
Cursed Mountain	Deep Silver	2009
Dead Rising: Chop Till You Drop	Capcom	WIN 08
Deal or No Deal	Destination	11/08
The Destiny of Zorro	Pronto Games	TBA
Disaster: Day of Crisis	Nintendo	TBA
Don King Presents: Prizefighter	Take-Two Interactive	3/09
Family Party: 30 Great Games	D3Publisher	11/08
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Crystal Bearers	Square Enix	TBA
Fishing Master: World Tour	Hudson	2009
Ghostbusters: The Video Game	TBA	2009
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince	Electronic Arts	7/09
Hasbro Family Game Night	Electronic Arts	11/08
The House of the Dead: Overkill	Sega	2009
Indoor Sports	Konami	TBA
Kung Fu Panda: Legendary Warriors	Activision	11/08
Little King's Story	XSEED	12/08
MadWorld	Sega	2009
Major Minor's Majestic March	Majesco	2009
Marble Saga: Kororinpa	Hudson	SPR 09
MLB Superstars	2K Sports	11/08
Monster Lab	Eidos	11/08
Moto GP 08	Capcom	11/08
Muramasa: The Demon Blade	XSEED	2009
Mushroom Men: The Spore Wars	Gamecock	11/08
Neopets Puzzle Adventure	Capcom	11/08
NERF N-Strike	Electronic Arts	11/08
Onechanbara: Bikini Zombie Slayers	D3Publisher	Q1 09
Overlord Dark Legend	Codemasters	2009
Pirateology	Codemasters	TBA
Pirates vs. Ninjas Dodgeball	Gamecock	WIN 08
Pro Evolution Soccer 2009	Konami	2009
Puzzle Kingdoms	Zoo Games	2008
Quantum of Solace	Activision	11/08
Rayman Raving Rabbids TV Party	Ubisoft	11/08
Rock Band 2	MTV Games	11/08
Roogoo Twisted Towers	SouthPeak	Q1 09
Rubik's World	The Game Factory	11/08
Runaway: The Dream of the Turtle	Focus Home Interactive	TBA
Rune Factory Frontier	Marvelous Interactive	2009
Rygar: The Battle of Argus	Tecmo	12/08
Samurai Shodown Anthology	SNK Playmore	Q4 08
Secret Files: Tunguska	Deep Silver	FALL 08
Shaun White Snowboarding: Road Trip	Ubisoft	11/08
Sim Animals	Electronic Arts	2009
Skate City Heroes	Zoo Games	Q1 09
Skate It	Electronic Arts	12/08
Sonic and the Black Knight	Sega	2009
Sonic Unleashed	Sega	11/08
Spyborgs	Capcom	2009
Star Wars The Clone Wars: Lightsaber Duels	LucasArts	11/08
Story Hour Adventures	Zoo Games	2008
Story Hour Fairy Tales	Zoo Games	2008
Tenchu 4	Ubisoft	2009
Tomb Raider: Underworld	Eidos	11/08
Trivial Pursuit	Electronic Arts	Q2 09
TV Show King Party	Gameloft	11/08
We Ski and Snowboard*	Namco Bandai	TBA
Wii Sports Resort	Nintendo	SPR 09
Wizardology	Codemasters	12/08
WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009	THQ	11/08

NINTENDO DS		
Again: Eye of Providence	Tecmo	SPR 09
Age of Empires: Mythologies	THQ	11/08
Avalon Code	Marvelous Interactive	Q1 09
Big Bang Mini	SouthPeak	Q4 08
Blood Bowl	Focus Home Interactive	2008
Blue Dragon Plus	Ignition	2/09
Bolt	Disney	11/08
Broken Sword	Ubisoft	2/09
Call of Duty: World at War	Activision	11/08
Catch of the Day	Electronic Arts	TBA
Chrono Trigger	Square Enix	12/08
Cooking Guide: Can't Decide What to Eat?*	Nintendo	11/08
Cradle of Rome	D3Publisher	11/08
de Blob	THQ	3/09
Disciples II	Strategy First	TBA
Don King Presents: Prizefighter	Take-Two Interactive	TBA
Doodle Hex	TBA	TBA
Dragon Ball: Origins	Atari	11/08
Dragon Quest V: Hand of the Heavenly Bride	Square Enix	TBA
Dragon Quest VI: Realms of Reverie	Square Enix	TBA
Dragonology	Codemasters	12/08
Drawn to Life: SpongeBob SquarePants Edition	THQ	9/08
Duke Nukem Trilogy: Chain Reaction	Deep Silver	2009
Duke Nukem Trilogy: Critical Mass	Deep Silver	2009
Duke Nukem Trilogy: Proving Grounds	Deep Silver	2009
Elebits: The Adventures of Kai and Zero	Konami	11/08
Flower, Sun, and Rain	Marvelous Entertainment USA/XSEED	3/09
Ghostbusters: The Video Game	TBA	2009
Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars	Rockstar	WIN 08
Gravity	Deep Silver	TBA
Guitar Hero On Tour: Decades	Activision	11/08
Guitar Rock Tour	Gameloft	11/08
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince	Electronic Arts	7/09
Henry Hatsworth and the Puzzling Adventure	Electronic Arts	2009
The Humans	Deep Silver	TBA
Imagine Movie Star	Ubisoft	11/08
Infinite Space	Sega	2009
Kung Fu Panda: Legendary Warriors	Activision	11/08
Last King of Africa	Focus Home Interactive	TBA
Luminous Arc 2	Atlus	11/08
Lux-Pain	Ignition	3/09
Metal Slug 7	Ignition	11/08
Monsters Racers	Koei	2009
Moon	Mastiff	11/08
Mushroom Men: Rise of the Fungi	Gamecock	11/08
National Geographic Panda	Namco Bandai	11/08
NERF N-Strike	Electronic Arts	11/08
Neopets Puzzle Adventure	Capcom	11/08
Overlord Minions	Codemasters	2009
Peggle	PopCap	2008
Pet Vet Down Under	Deep Silver	TBA
Pirate Battle	Orbital Media	TBA
Pirateology	Codemasters	TBA
Pokémon Ranger: Shadows of Almia	Nintendo	11/08
Prince of Persia: The Fallen King	Ubisoft	11/08
Princess on Ice	Aksys	WIN 08
Puzzle Kingdoms	Zoo Games	2008
Puzzle Quest: Galactrix	D3Publisher	Q1 09
Quantum of Solace	Activision	11/08
Rayman Raving Rabbids TV Party	Ubisoft	11/08
Real Soccer 2009	Gameloft	11/08
Rhythm Heaven	Nintendo	TBA
Roogoo Tower Attack	SouthPeak	Q1 09
Rubik's World	The Game Factory	11/08
Runaway: The Dream of the Turtle	Focus Home Interactive	TBA
Secret Files: Tunguska	Deep Silver	FALL 08
Shaun White Snowboarding	Ubisoft	11/08
Sim Animals	Electronic Arts	2009
Skate It	Electronic Arts	12/08
Star Wars The Clone Wars: Jedi Alliance	LucasArts	11/08
Suikoden: Tierkreis	Konami	12/08
Theresia	Aksys	11/08
Tom Clancy's EndWar	Ubisoft	11/08
Tony Hawk's Motion/ Hue Pixel Painter	Activision	11/08
TrackMania DS	Focus Home Interactive	Q4 08
Warlords DS	Strategy First	TBA
A Witch's Tale	NIS America	Q1 09
Wizardology	Codemasters	12/08
Wonder World Amusement Park	Majesco	11/08
World Destruction	Sega	FALL 09
WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009	THQ	11/08
Zenses: Ocean	The Game Factory	11/08
Zenses: Rainforest	The Game Factory	11/08

BITS OF TID

Two Towers

Acclaimed Xbox Live Arcade puzzler Roogoo comes to Wii and DS.

Early next year, SouthPeak Games and Spider Monk Entertainment will bring Roogoo Twisted Towers and Roogoo Tower Attack to Wii and DS, respectively. Both titles build upon the core gameplay that made the Xbox Live Arcade version a hit, but with a bevy of new platform-specific features.

Switch Shooter

EA and Hasbro team up to make a NERF light gun.

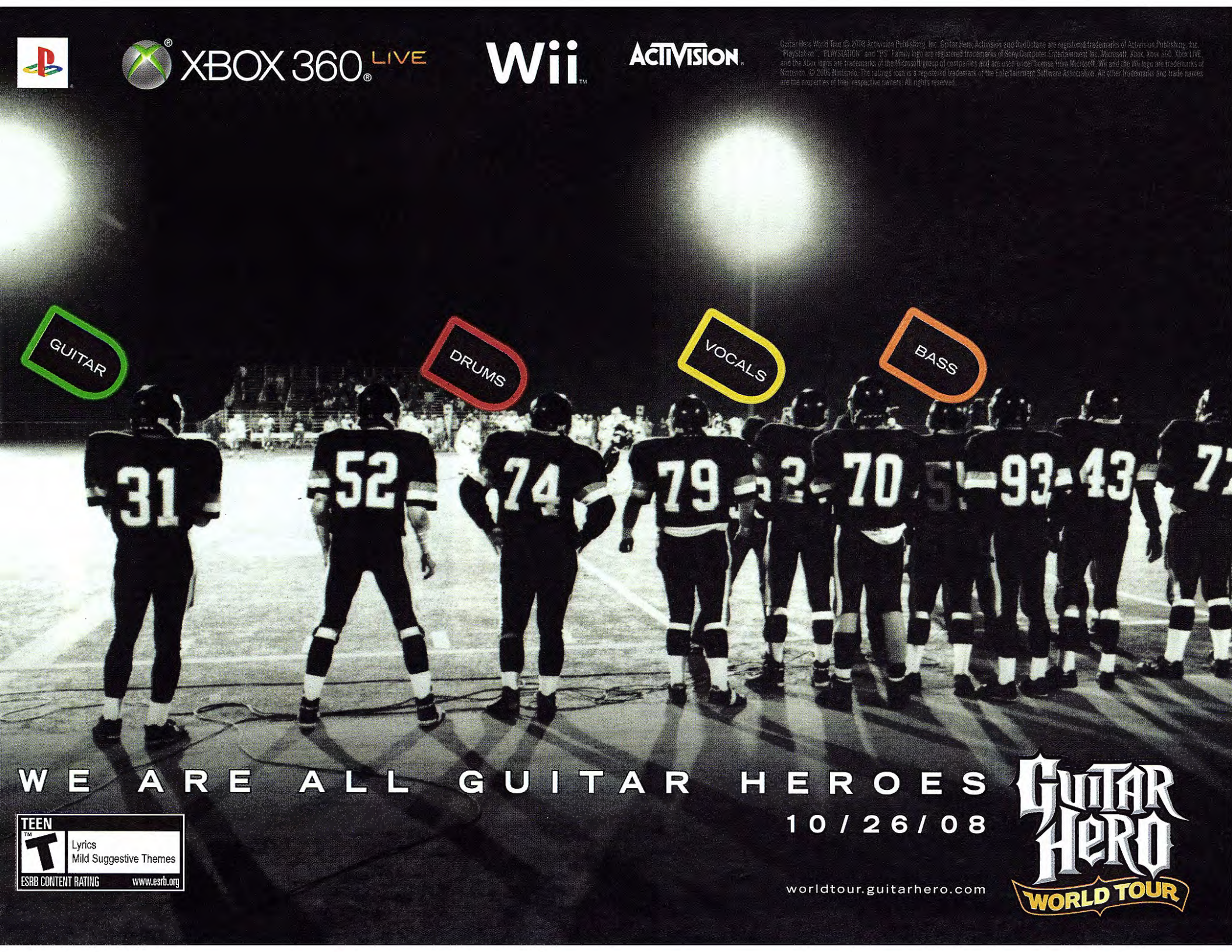
EA's NERF N-Strike for Wii will come bundled with one of the best peripherals we've seen: the Switch Shot. More than just another light gun shell for your remote, the Switch Shot can transform into a fully functional NERF gun.

Wii Are Family

Grab Grandma and little Billy for Family Party.

D3Publisher is getting in on the Wii minigame craze with Family Party: 30 Great Games, due this November for $19.95. Developed by Tamsoft, Family Party's activities range from track and field events to tests of wit. Best of all, you can play as an old man, and nothing is more entertaining than watching the elderly attempt logrolling.

RED TEXT = TITLES ADDED THIS MONTH *TENTATIVE TITLE NOTE: RELEASE DATES OFTEN CHANGE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Wii
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Wii Channels

We pull back the shadows on LIT, get ready for fun in the sun with Sandy Beach, and deliver the latest reviews, poll results, and more in this issue's Channels section.

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LIT

WiiWARE PREVIEW
Sandy Beach

NEWS
Mega Man 9 Downloadable Content

RESULTS
Everybody Votes Channel

RESULTS
Most Wanted Virtual Console Games

WiiWARE REVIEWS

GROOVIN' BLOCKS
MEGA MAN 9
MY AQUARIUM
POTPOURRII
PLÄTTCHEN TWIST 'N' PAINT
STRONG BAD'S COOL GAME FOR ATTRACTIVE PEOPLE EPISODE 2: STRONG BADIA THE FREE

VIRTUAL CONSOLE REVIEWS

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CLU CLU LAND
FINAL SOLDIER
MEGA MAN 2
SUPER DODGE BALL
SUPER MARIO RPG: LEGEND OF THE SEVEN STARS
VECTORMAN

Heart of Darkness

Peer into the gloom for the first screens and full details of WayForward's WiiWare horror-puzzle game LIT.

Are you afraid of the dark? When you play LIT, you will be. An original property created by WayForward (the developers of Shantae and Contra 4, among other games), LIT is an action-puzzle game that is built around the concept that light is life and darkness is death.

LIT casts you in the role of Jake, a normal high-school student who finds himself in a decidedly abnormal situation when his school is overrun by shadowy creatures. It's too dark to see them, but you can sense them everywhere—crawling under desks and scratching at the walls. Jake and his girlfriend Rachael appear to be the only survivors of the infestation, but they've been separated, remaining in contact only by cell phone as they make their way through the school in a bid to escape the horrors within.

Thirty levels, however, stand between you and freedom; you'll have to use your wits and your surroundings if you ever want to see Rachael again. Although you can move around the environments with the nunchuk's Control Stick (as you might in a typical survival-horror game), the gameplay itself consists of using light sources to carve a pathway through the darkness and reach the exit of each room. By pointing your flashlight via the Wii remote, you'll be able to look around the room (you can even switch from the standard top-down view to a 3-D behind-the-back perspective if you wish) and keep the darkness at bay, but you'll need to do more than that to stay alive. You'll have to turn on lamps, break windows, activate computer monitors, trigger motion sensors, use a variety of tools (such as flares, TV remotes, and a slingshot), and more.

CONFIDENTIAL

SECURITY CLEARANCE (F-9)

Department of Intelligence

Code Name:

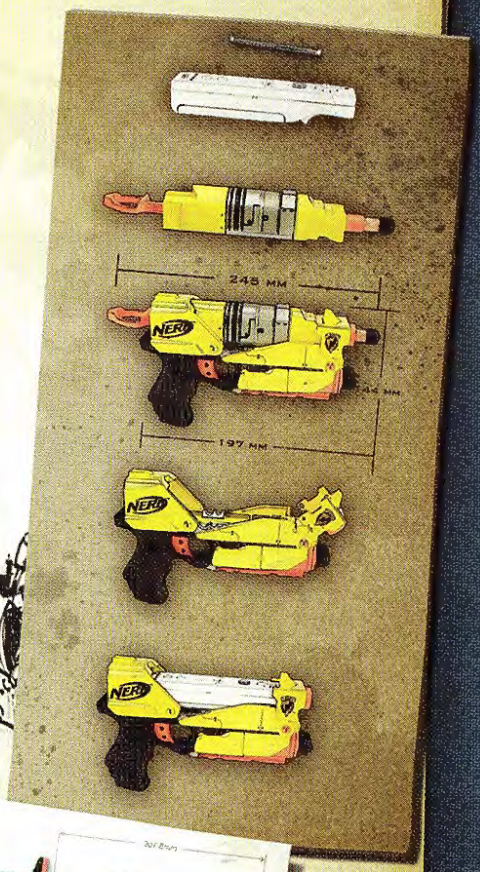
Switch Shot EX-3

NERF

CONFIDENTIAL

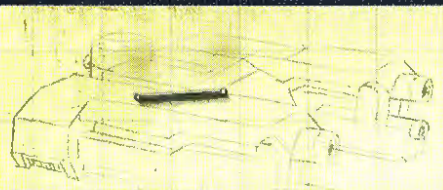
What To Look For

Switch Shot EX-3 is the world's only blaster that works alone or with a **Wii Remote.**



When paired with a Wii remote, **SWITCH SHOT EX-3** can be used to **ANNIHILATE** enemy forces.

Destruction of enemy forces throughout multiple levels of gameplay may also lead to the unlocking of over 25 super-**advanced/secret** NERF blasters.



THREAT WARNING!

To: all Departmental Chiefs

SUBJECT: Switch Shot EX-3

Agency operatives have determined Nomad C Series N-Strike bots have seized control of the world's first 2-IN-1 NERF BLASTER Code Name: SWITCH SHOT EX-3™ [redacted].

Operatives have determined SWITCH SHOT EX-3 blaster and [redacted] video game could be used to recruit and train N-Strike recruits.

Operatives fear training may lead to [redacted] a legion of N-Strike Elite!

----------///END OF STATEMENT///----------

IF SWITCH SHOT EX-3 IS DETECTED, SEIZE IMMEDIATELY.

EVERYONE 10+ Fantasy Violence ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

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Wii NERF EA

2 in 1

CONFIDENTIAL

SWITCH SHOT EX-3 is [redacted] the WORLD'S ONLY 2-IN-1 blaster. While it can be used to [redacted] launch regular blaster darts - MODIFYING for [redacted] video gameplay takes mere moments.

Twice the Firepower!

--Commit contents to memory and destroy this--

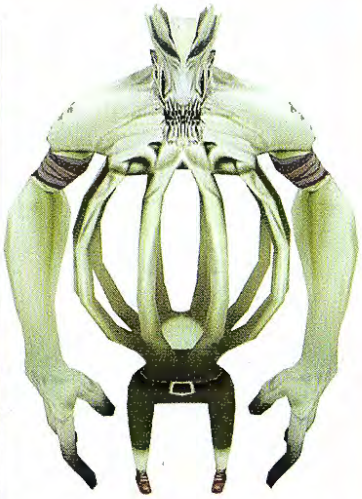
--Be Advised--

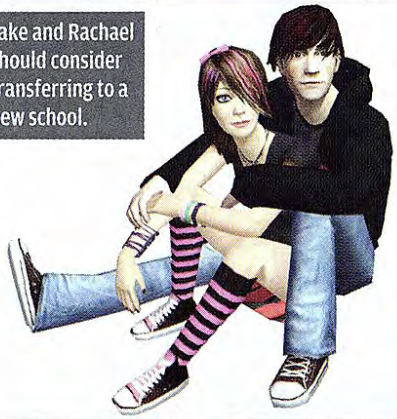
Operatives have confirmed the VULCAN EBF-25™ Super Blaster has also been leaked and is now available to the masses.....

The VULCAN EBF-25 is an awesome blaster that can fire 3 darts per second.....More data to follow as VULCAN EBF-25 intelligence develops.

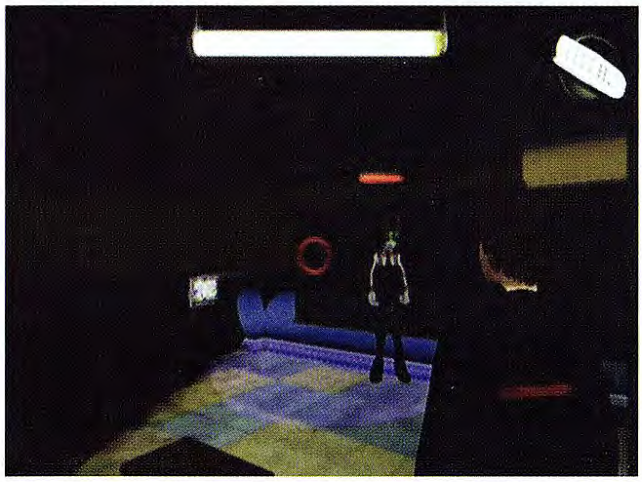
WWW.NERF.EA.COM

Vulcan EBF-25





Jake and Rachael should consider transferring to a new school.



If the meter at the top of the screen fills up, a fuse will blow, leaving you in total darkness.

An early puzzle, for example, requires you to turn on a lamp, which provides enough light for you to reach some slingshot ammo that you can use to break a window. The light from the broken window provides a pathway deeper into the room, where you can grab more ammo, break another window, then reach another lamp that illuminates the room's exit.

Other levels promise to be more challenging, especially since there are restrictions on how much electricity you can consume; if you use too much, a fuse will blow, leaving you to be consumed by the darkness. Additionally, the game features five puzzle-oriented boss fights against what are evidently corrupted members of the school's staff, including the gym teacher, a janitor, and the principal.

No matter what challenges Jake faces, the capabilities of the Wii remote promise to be up to the task—you'll point at the screen to aim your slingshot, make a throwing motion to toss cherry bombs, and shake the remote to recharge the flashlight's batteries. You'll also use the remote as a cell phone to receive calls from Rachael (they play through the remote's speaker) as she updates you on her progress and encourages you through the levels. Your phone conversations influence what kind of ending you'll get, and other goodies become available after the credits roll, such as an additional difficulty setting and the ability to play as Rachael.

WayForward is expecting to have LIT finished before the end of the year, but no release date has been confirmed as of press time. When it does come out, however, don't be surprised if you find yourself playing with the lights on.

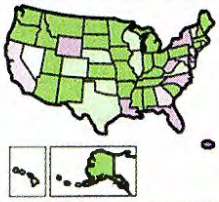
—CHRIS H.

SURVEY SAYS...

The Everybody Votes channel continues to ask the burning questions that people want answered. Here are some of the more interesting results from recent weeks.

Have you ever convinced another person to buy a Wii console?

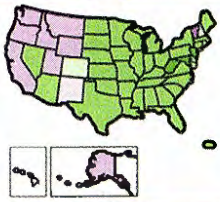
Yes: 49.5% | No: 50.5%



How dare you, green-colored states? How dare you not convince others to purchase a Wii!? Now we know who our friends are!

How many television sets are in your home?

Three or fewer: 45.8% | More than three: 54.2%



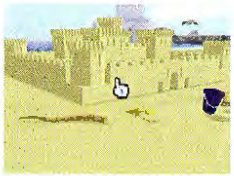
So much for the west-coast elite! Surprisingly, west-coasters are less likely to own a lot of TVs. Go figure.

Do you remember your 11th birthday?

Yes: 44.7% | No: 55.3%

Most people seem not to remember their 11th birthday—except for the folks in Puerto Rico. Apparently someone's been playing Brain Age.

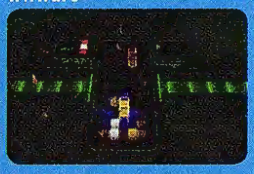
DOWNLOAD STATION



Life's a Beach

When people talk about sandbox-style gameplay, they usually don't mean it literally. Not so with Konami's upcoming WiiWare game Sandy Beach, in which you get to build sandcastles using the Wii remote, then defend them from destructive crabs. The game can be played cooperatively with two players, and you can take photos of your creations to show your friends. Best of all—no sand in your shorts.

WiiWare



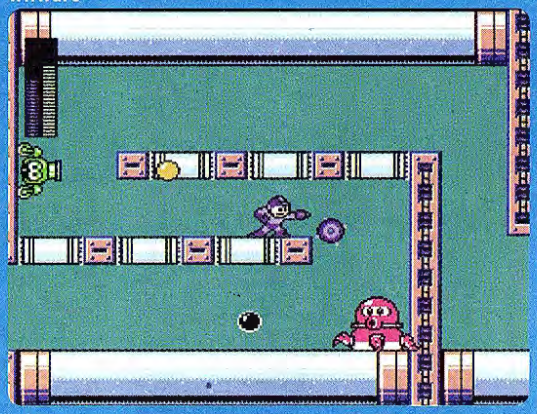
GROOVIN' BLOCKS

PUBLISHER: **EMPTY CLIP STUDIOS**
GENRE: **PUZZLE**
Wii POINTS: **800**

Bringing rhythm to color-matching puzzles, Groovin' Blocks challenges you to drop blocks to techno music. If you hit the beat as you manipulate the pieces, you'll ratchet up your score with multipliers. Since scoring big is how you unlock more songs, following the music is as important as making smart matches. The game floats cleverly between the two disciplines and emerges as a winner. –GEORGE S.

Recommended

WiiWare



MEGA MAN 9

PUBLISHER: **CAPCOM** • GENRE: **ACTION** • Wii POINTS: **1,000**

Chris H's Pick

Mega Man 9 is, in a word, fantastic. The run-jump-shoot-steal weapons formula is just as fun now as it ever was (although I do miss the slide maneuver), and the developers have nailed the retro game-play perfectly while elevating 8-bit-style visuals to an art form. It is more cerebral than past Mega Man games, but the formidable challenge is fair, if not for the easily flustered. Capcom may not have met its goal of surpassing Mega Man 2 with this entry, but Mega Man 9 is a winner through and through.

Recommended

WiiWare

MY AQUARIUM

PUBLISHER: **HUDSON**
GENRE: **ALTERNATIVE**
Wii POINTS: **500**

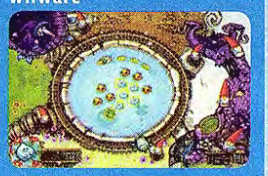
There's not a whole lot to My Aquarium, other than rearranging objects in your tank, unlocking new fish, or waggling your remote to tap on the glass. Still, it's certainly a relaxing product—you can just zone out for a bit, leaving one of your six custom aquariums running on your TV while the in-game classical music plays in the background. Simply put, My Aquarium is an interactive screen saver, but it is less work than maintaining a real fishbowl. –JUSTIN C.

Hmmm...

More for Your Mega Man

If you're a fan of hard-core action games, then chances are you've already purchased Mega Man 9, beat Mega Man 9, and are hungry for more. Well, Capcom's gonna give it to you in the form of downloadable content. Scheduled for release before the end of October are Protoman mode (200 Wii Points), Endless Attack mode (300 points), a Special Stage (100 points), and Hero and Superhero difficulty settings (100 points each).

WiiWare



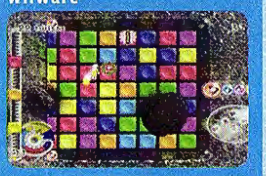
POTPOURRII

PUBLISHER: **ABSTRACTION GAMES**
GENRE: **PUZZLE**
ORIGINAL RELEASE: **800**

Potpourrii applies a rock-paper-scissors relationship to the four seasons, challenging you to destroy winter sprites with spring sprites, spring sprites with summer sprites, and so on throughout the year. A lack of in-game instructions makes the early goings confusing, but once you remember the relationship between the seasons, it'll probably be too simple to hold your attention for long. –GEORGE S.

Hmmm...

WiiWare



PLÄTTCHEN TWIST 'N' PAINT

PUBLISHER: **BPLUS**
GENRE: **PUZZLE**
Wii POINTS: **1,000**

Puzzle games are supposed to be easy to play but hard to master. Apparently nobody told the guys that made Plättchen about the "easy to play" part. If the dense rules don't knock you for a loop, the convoluted story definitely will. Everything about the game is overly complex—from the lack of clear level goals to the seemingly random need to shoot down asteroids while matching up colored tiles. –CHRIS H.

Grumble Grumble

WiiWare

STRONG BAD EPISODE 2: STRONG BADIA THE FREE

PUBLISHER: **TELLTALE**
GENRE: **ADVENTURE**
Wii POINTS: **1,000**

Like the first episode of Strong Bad's Cool Game for Attractive People, Strong Badia the Free is a solid and funny point-and-click adventure. The semilinear structure is somewhat limiting, but it sets the game apart from its predecessor while retaining the clever puzzles and humorous dialogue. Despite some occasional control-response problems, the game is a lot of fun. –CHRIS H.

Recommended

Virtual Console

CHO ANIKI

PLATFORM: **TURBOGRAFX16**
PUBLISHER: **HUDSON**
GENRE: **SHOOTER**
ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1992**

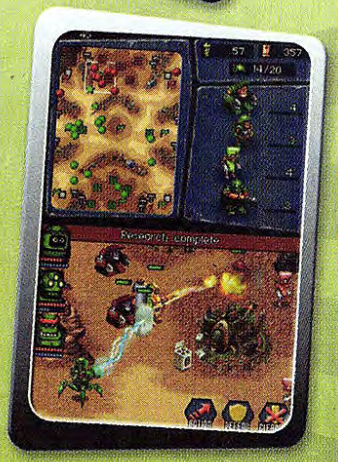
If you've heard of import shooter Cho Aniki before, it was probably in the context of it being really weird. As in, "your attack drones are muscle men in Speedos" weird. Granted, it's not as weird as its sequels, but it's still plenty strange. Beyond the freak factor, however, the game doesn't really stand out from all the other shooters on Virtual Console. Not that there's anything wrong with that. –CHRIS H.

Hmmm...

ATTENNNNTION!!!

Robocalyptic Real-Time Strategy on the Nintendo DS™!

- **Robots with Attitude:** Over 10 different robot units with specialized skills and weapons all with distinct attitudes and personalities!
- **Wacky Weapons:** Over 20 weapon types!
- **Total Stylus Control:** No buttons -- just point & tap!
- **Multiplayer Mayhem:** 1 - 4 multiplayer Wireless DS Multi-card Play!
- **Heroes Win the War:** Heroes embody powerful & supreme capabilities!



Enjoy your destruction!

LEAD YOUR ARMY TO VICTORY!

Are you with us?

EVERYONE 10+
Cartoon Violence
Mild Suggestive Themes
Use of Tobacco
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

NINTENDO DS™

VOGSTER™ ENTERTAINMENT

TECMO

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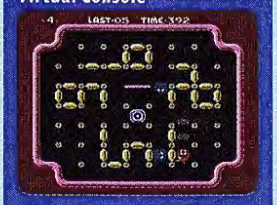
Virtual Console



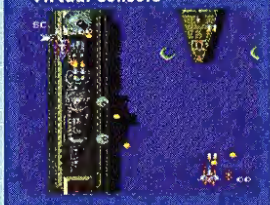
CLU CLU LAND

PLATFORM: **NES**
PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
GENRE: **ACTION**
ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1985**

When I first started playing Clu Clu Land I thought my controller was broken. Your character moves automatically and the gameplay consists of rotating around posts by sticking out either arm. Even after you wrap your head around the unusual mechanics, indistinct goals detract from the vaguely Pac-Man-esque action. It's not nearly up to par with most Nintendo-published titles. –CHRIS H.

Grumble Grumble

Virtual Console



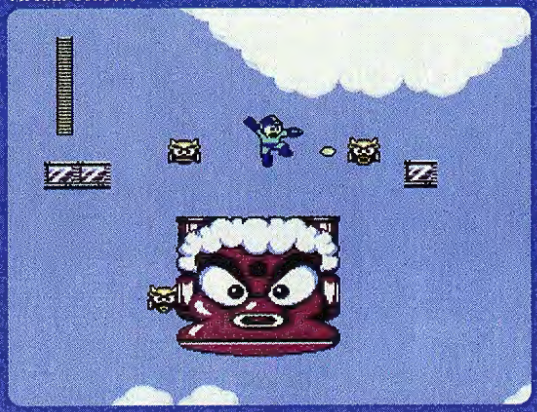
FINAL SOLDIER

PLATFORM: **TURBOGRAFX16**
PUBLISHER: **HUDSON**
GENRE: **SHOOTER**
ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1991**

In case you hadn't noticed, the TurboGrafx16 hosted a lot of shooters. Final Soldier is a solid top-down effort, but it doesn't really do anything to set itself apart (aside from being less teeth-gnashingly difficult than most of its contemporaries). This is the first time the game's been available on these shores, however, so it may be of some historical interest to die-hard fans of the genre. –STEVE T.

Hmmm...

Virtual Console



MEGA MAN 2

PLATFORM: **NES** • PUBLISHER: **CAPCOM**
GENRE: **ACTION** • ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1989**

Chris H's Pick

Mega Man 2 is as good as it gets on the NES. Capcom took the winning weapon-stealing formula of the first Mega Man and dramatically improved upon it with more levels, new gadgets, better graphics, and an awesome soundtrack. In addition, the varied weapons allow for a more flexible experience than do other titles in the series. If you've never played Mega Man 2 before, don't miss out–it's what I consider a perfect game.

Recommended

Virtual Console

SUPER DODGE BALL

PLATFORM: **NES**
PUBLISHER: **AKSYS**
GENRE: **SPORTS**
ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1989**

Once you get past the überflickery graphics, you'll find that Super Dodge Ball actually has a lot going for it. There's the River City Ransom-style aesthetics, for one, and the gameplay (take control of a six-man team and chuck a ball at your opponents until they run out of health, while avoiding getting hit yourself) is pretty simple yet surprisingly deep. –JUSTIN C.

Recommended

Virtual Console

SUPER MARIO RPG: LEGEND OF THE SEVEN STARS

PLATFORM: **SUPER NES** • PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
GENRE: **RPG** • ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1996**

Chris Sh's Pick

Though developed by Squaresoft, Super Mario RPG goes beyond the cookie-cutter role-playing mold of its day to include plenty of platforming and puzzle-solving. Fans of the more recent Mario & Luigi games, as well as the Paper Mario titles, will recognize Super Mario RPG's influence everywhere they go. This is a must-have for Mario fans.

Recommended

Virtual Console

VECTORMAN

PLATFORM: **GENESIS**
PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
GENRE: **ACTION**
ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1995**

Vectorman was Sega's answer to Donkey Kong Country, using prerendered character models and background elements to give the illusion of three dimensions. Ironically, it's also similarly overrated in my opinion. The action is pretty unexceptional, and the visuals actually aren't that appealing now that the newness has worn off. As Genesis titles go, this one's definitely second-tier. –STEVE T.

Hmmm...

WANTED!

The votes are in for the most-wanted Sega Genesis games on Virtual Console, and, characteristically, Sonic the Hedgehog is the leader of the pack. The editors and the readers were in agreement for the most part–it's hard to argue against franchises such as Shining Force and Mega Man. Vectorman actually came in tied for fourth place on the readers' list, but we took it out of the running since it was released for VC in September.

READERS' MOST WANTED: SEGA GENESIS

1 Sonic & Knuckles
2 Shining Force II
3 Mega Man: The Wily Wars (Europe & Japan)
4 Earthworm Jim
5 Castlevania: Bloodlines

NP STAFF'S MOST WANTED: SEGA GENESIS

1 Mega Man: The Wily Wars (Europe & Japan)
2 Phantasy Star IV: The End of the Millennium
3 The Revenge of Shinobi
4 Sonic & Knuckles
5 Shining Force II

Next issue we'll continue the 16-bit love by printing the most-wanted Super NES games, followed by the most-wanted TurboGrafx16 and Turbo CD titles. Send your top five picks for **SNES** and/or **TurboGrafx** to **vcpoll@nintendopower.com** and we'll print the results in an upcoming issue. Note: This is for polling purposes only and will in no way determine future Virtual Console releases.

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THIS MONTH IN PREVIEWS

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Mile-High Fear

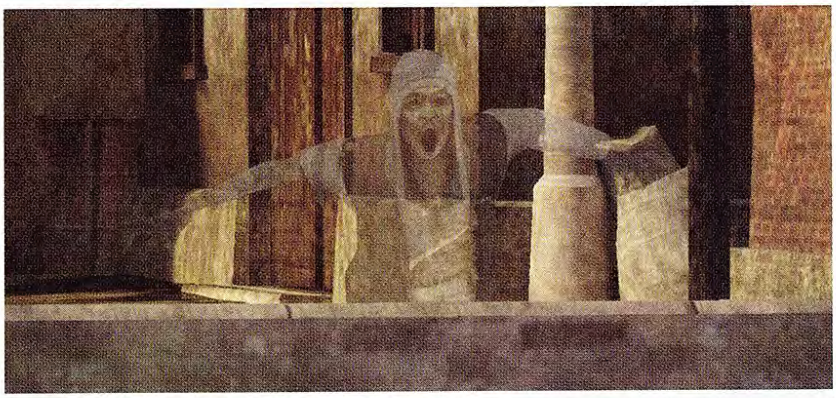
>CURSED MOUNTAIN

PLATFORM: **Wii** • PUBLISHER: **DEEP SILVER**
DEVELOPER: **DEEP SILVER** • RELEASE: **2009**

Most of you probably haven't heard of Deep Silver, but the Austria-based upstart, founded by former members of Rockstar Vienna, hopes to change that with Cursed Mountain. This Wii-exclusive survival-horror offering indeed shows considerable promise, and the publisher has already demonstrated superb judgment by giving Nintendo Power an exclusive first look at the game in action.

Set in the Tibetan Himalayas, Cursed Mountain puts you in the boots of Frank Simmons, a mountain climber whose brother mysteriously went missing on these same peaks during a recent expedition. As Frank sets out to find his younger sibling, he'll have more to contend with than just the harsh elements—namely, some very disgruntled ghosts. Fortunately, our hero has the ability to peer into Bardo, the Tibetan Buddhist's idea of the transitional state between life and death. Doing so covers the screen in a dark, creepy mist, but it's the only way you can perceive an attacking spirit. To release one of the tortured souls from its terrestrial prison, you first point the Wii remote at the ghost, then jerk the controller toward you. A sequence of Buddhist prayer gestures then flashes across the screen, and you must mimic each of them with the remote and nunchuk. The more powerful the apparition, the more numerous and complex the gestures. Asked about the choice of platform for Cursed Mountain, managing director Hannes Seifert cites this combat system as the deciding factor. "In most survival-horror games, you sort of curl up and clutch the controller close to your body," says Seifert. "When you're forced to open your arms and perform these types of gestures, you feel very vulnerable. We think that adds a lot to the experience."

The mountain itself also plays an important part in your journey, its imposing summit ever present in the background as you constantly work your way up. The high altitude means Frank can run only a few steps at a time before slowing down (making it difficult to escape certain foes), and myriad environmental obstacles require special use of motion controls. You'll tilt the remote left and right to keep your balance while crossing a narrow cliff, for instance, or alternate lifting the remote and nunchuk to climb a steep wall of ice. The setting also creates a pervasive sense of isolation, which makes the whole affair even more unsettling. Nevertheless, we're anxious to explore further. —STEVE T.



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The Battle Rages On

> RYGAR: THE BATTLE OF ARGUS

PLATFORM: **Wii** • PUBLISHER: **TECMO**
DEVELOPER: **TECMO** • RELEASE: **DECEMBER 2008**

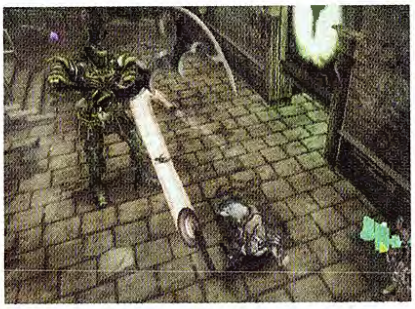
It's been more than 20 long years since Rygar fought back the forces of evil on a Nintendo system, but this winter the Diskarmor-wielding hero will be back and better than ever in Rygar: The Battle of Argus. An enhanced version of 2002's PlayStation 2 title Rygar: The Legendary Adventure, The Battle of Argus is a Greco-Roman-themed adventure game that's packed with hard-hitting action and several Wii-exclusive features.

As in the classic Rygar games, a huge part of the appeal stems from the unique Diskarmor weapon—a large spiked disc attached to a chain. In the adventure mode, you press the A and B buttons to dish out weak and strong attacks, respectively, then swing the Wii remote (sometimes once, sometimes multiple times) to complete a punishing combo. As you acquire new Diskarmor during your quest, you'll be able to use additional fighting styles and magic attacks, and the Diskarmor is good for more than offense; you can also use it like a grappling hook to navigate the platforming-heavy stages. As you make your way through graphically upgraded environments (including ruined temples, lava-filled caves, and floating islands), you'll have to be on the lookout for eight new enemy types that weren't in the PS2 game, such as massive knights with unblockable attacks, and quick ninjalike enemies with strong defensive capabilities. The developers hope to not only introduce more variety with the new enemies, but also to make the title more challenging than the PS2 version while maintaining a better balance and a smoother difficulty curve.

Perhaps the most significant addition, however, is the brand-new Gladiator mode—a 30-round survival mode in which you swing the Wii remote to attack directly with the Diskarmor in an attempt to defeat wave after wave of foes, including bosses on every fifth round. Don't worry about a high combo count here; Gladiator mode is all about unleashing the heaviest hits, and the harder you swing the remote, the more powerful your strike.

Traditional adventure games for Wii are in somewhat short supply this holiday season, so Rygar: The Battle of Argus might be just the thing to satisfy your heroic, world-saving urges. —CHRIS H.

Cerberus, the holy beast lodging in a Diskarmor. Do you agree that this man is the caliber of a lion?



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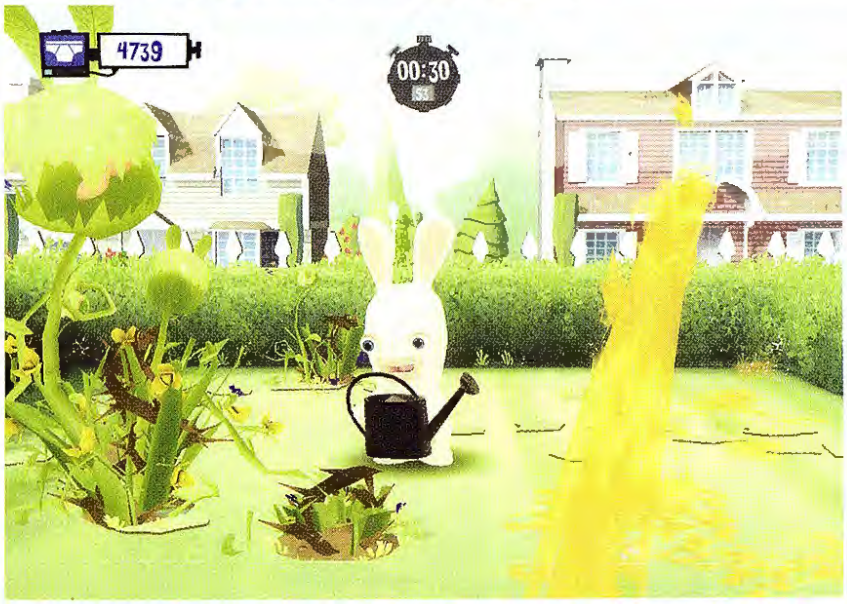
Judgment Day

>CASTLEVANIA JUDGMENT

PLATFORM: **Wii** • PUBLISHER: **KONAMI**
DEVELOPER: **KONAMI** • RELEASE: **NOVEMBER 2008**

It's a scary proposition: taking a beloved series like Castlevania and dropping its familiar adventure formula in favor of one-on-one fighting. But that's what Konami has done with Castlevania Judgment. Fortunately for series fans, the developers are giving players plenty of content to sink their fangs into. The depth starts with the character roster; in addition to previously revealed warriors Simon Belmont, Alucard, Maria, Shanoa, and Dracula, the game features Trevor Belmont, Sypha Belnades, Grant Danasty (all from Castlevania III), Eric Lecarde (from Castlevania: Bloodlines), werewolf Cornell (from Castlevania: Legacy of Darkness), and a few villains, including time-manipulating newcomer Aeon. The game has plenty of modes, too; there are personalized Story modes for each warrior, plus you can engage in traditional Arcade, Versus, and Survival modes, as well as a Castle mode in which you proceed through Dracula's abode, floor by floor, while dealing with certain restrictions. And if you're not convinced that swinging a Wii remote is the best way to beat the Count, worry not; you can also play using the GameCube or Classic controller. –CHRIS H.



Boob Tube

>RAYMAN RAVING RABBIDS TV PARTY

PLATFORM: **Wii (ALSO ON DS)** • PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT**
DEVELOPER: **UBISOFT PARIS** • RELEASE: **NOVEMBER 2008**

The third installment in Ubisoft's popular party-game franchise offers another assortment of minigames starring those lovably wacked-out lagomorphs, only this time the festivities are couched in a TV motif. It seems the rabbids have taken over the airwaves, and their hijinks are presented via different themed channels. The Cult Movies channel includes a zombie-themed light-gun shooter, for instance, while Trash TV has you competing in a tractor race. Taking the concept a bit further are interactive commercials that interrupt the action and bestow the winner with some sort of bonus once play resumes. Of course, everything is bolstered by the manic humor for which the series is known, but it doesn't parody popular TV shows as much as we expected, which seems like a missed opportunity.

On the other hand, TV Party does deserve credit for being the first game you can play with your butt, thanks to Wii Balance Board compatibility. We had a chance to try Wildebeest Sledding, in which you steer by shifting your weight while sitting on the board, and it actually works really well. Who needs thumbs? –STEVE T.

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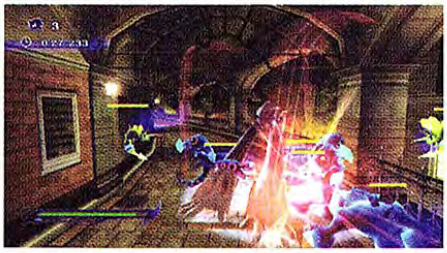

Fleet Feet, Ferocious Fists

>SONIC UNLEASHED

PLATFORM: **Wii** • PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
DEVELOPER: **SONICTEAM** • RELEASE: **NOVEMBER 2008**

With Sonic Unleashed racing toward a November release, we finally got hands-on time with a few near-finished levels from the Wii version. Consider us impressed. That's especially true of the back-to-basics daytime stages, which see the hedgehog sprint through some beautifully rendered and impressively complex environments at breakneck speeds. As we've mentioned before, the game transitions back and forth between a 3-D behind-the-back perspective and classic 2-D side-scrolling, with the breakdown in the areas we played falling at about 70-30. Each stage boasted lots of hidden, alternate routes, as well as plentiful opportunities to take advantage of the new drift mechanic, which is a heck of a lot of fun.

The nighttime stages, in which Sonic transforms into a burly, snarling werehog, aren't as compelling, but they are more enjoyable than skeptics may have feared, thanks to some intricate platforming that complements the rather simplistic fisticuffs. **–STEVE T.**

White Winter

>SHAUN WHITE SNOWBOARDING: ROAD TRIP

PLATFORM: **Wii (ALSO ON DS)** • PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT**
DEVELOPER: **UBISOFT MONTREAL**
RELEASE: **NOVEMBER 2008**

Casual-friendly, arcade-style sports games à la the Tony Hawk and SSX titles seem to have fallen by the wayside as of late, but Ubisoft is hoping to reinvigorate the genre with Shaun White Snowboarding. In particular, the developers at Ubisoft Montreal have gone out of their way to make Road Trip, the Wii edition, unique from the other versions of the game.

Road Trip supports two different control systems, one using just the Wii remote and one using the Balance Board. The remote control scheme is easy to use and fun, but the game really shines when playing with the Balance Board. The developers have done an admirable job of making the Balance Board a viable control device for the game– it reacts well to your movements and makes snowboarding seem very intuitive. Environments from around the world (including Canada, Chile, Switzerland, and Japan) provide a variety of slopes, while game modes ranging from races to score competitions to item-collecting contests help deliver that arcade-style gameplay we've been missing. **–TOM H.**

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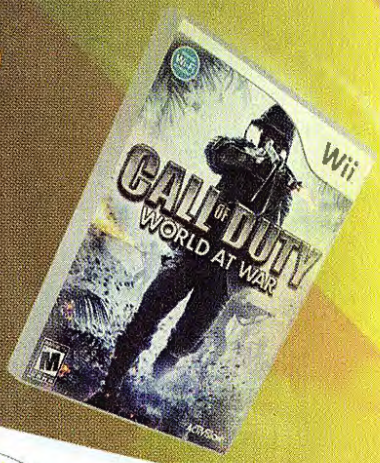

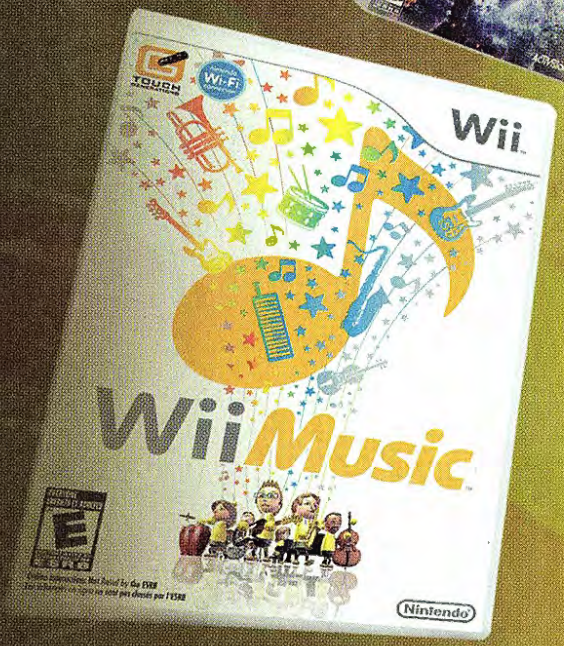

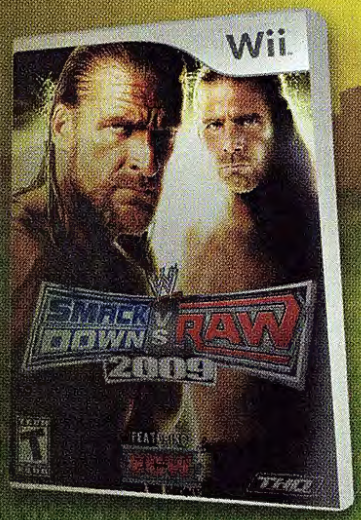

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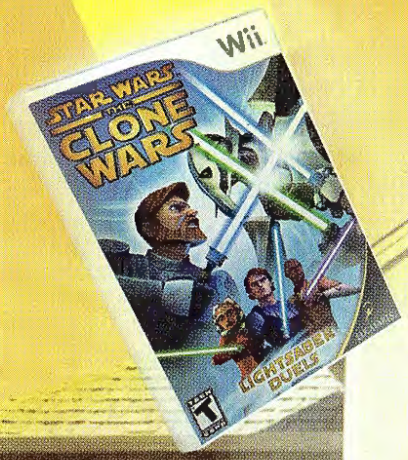

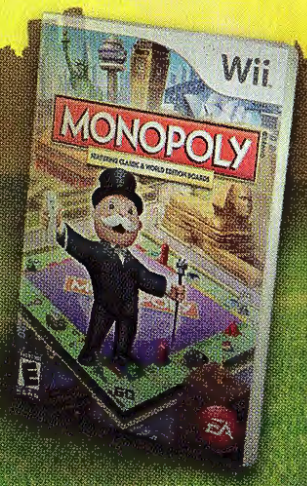

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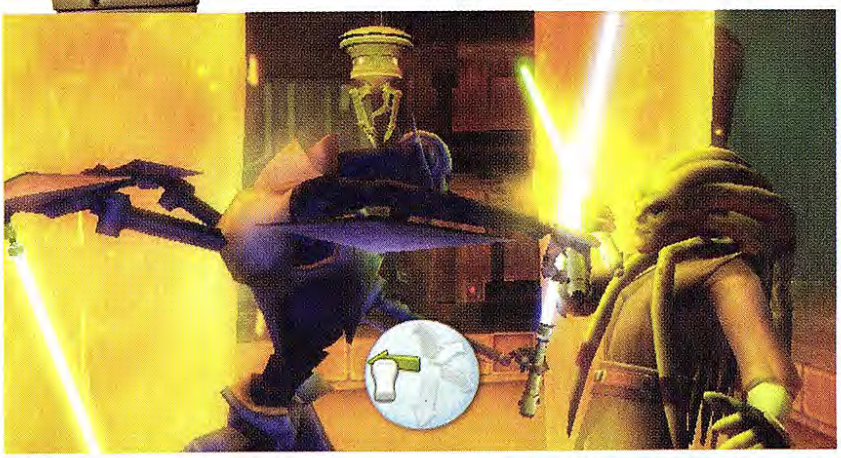
Duel of the Fates

>STAR WARS THE CLONE WARS: LIGHTSABER DUELS

PLATFORM: **Wii** • PUBLISHER: **LUCASARTS**
DEVELOPER: **KROME** • RELEASE: **NOVEMBER 2008**

The *Star Wars:* *The Clone Wars* film was a CG-animated movie targeted at young *Star Wars* fans, and it served as a launching pad for a television show. The upcoming Wii-exclusive video game, Lightsaber Duels, is also youth-oriented, but there's plenty to like for longtime *Star Wars* fans, too. You assume the role of one of 10 characters (Anakin, Mace Windu, Count Dooku, and more) and face off one-on-one against another lightsaber-wielding opponent, using your Wii remote like a lightsaber. Your motions don't match up one-to-one with the onscreen action—think of each swing as a button press in a traditional fighting game. You can waggle wildly if you want, but performing one of the preset combos is a better way to ensure victory. You'll definitely have to pay attention to your swinging when the minigames pop up mid-duel; you have to follow the onscreen commands more quickly than your adversary to gain the upper hand. —JUSTIN C.



Puzzle Power

>NEOPETS PUZZLE ADVENTURE

PLATFORM: **Wii, DS** • PUBLISHER: **CAPCOM**
DEVELOPER: **INFINITE INTERACTIVE**
RELEASE: **NOVEMBER 2008**

The guys behind Puzzle Quest are at it again. Their latest addition to the puzzle-game-meets-RPG genre is Neopets Puzzle Adventure, which, as the title implies, stars the popular Internet-based Neopets and boasts a story involving meteors, monsters, and plenty of cheesy humor. Happily, this single-player quest is augmented by a multiplayer mode where two people can slug it out for puzzle domination.

If you've ever played the board games Go or Reversi, the puzzle mechanics will seem familiar: surround your opponent's red pieces with your blue ones to claim them as your own. However, you can also use helpers called PetPets to perform special attacks, such as removing pieces from the board. Also, in a bit of an unusual twist, gaining experience has little effect on your character. Instead it unlocks codes that give your Internet-based Neopet access to new items. This feature wasn't operative at press time, so we can't say what the unlockables are—but we're pretty sure Neopet owners are going to be pleased. —ALAN A.

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Sea the World

> FISHING MASTER: WORLD TOUR

PLATFORM: **Wii** • PUBLISHER: **HUDSON**
DEVELOPER: **HUDSON** • RELEASE: **Q1 2009**

To become a legendary fisherman, you have to do more than just catch big fish—you have to catch big fish at exotic locations all over the world. At least, that's the premise in Hudson's Fishing Master: World Tour, the sequel to last year's lighthearted Fishing Master. Like in that game, the controls in World Tour make it easy for anyone to become an expert angler—you cast by raising and flicking the Wii remote, reel in the fish by rotating the nunchuk (or using buttons or the Control Stick if you prefer), and land your catch by yanking the remote upward. There are additional nuances, such as swinging the remote left or right at given times to stun the fish, but it remains intuitive enough that anyone can play, even those who've never picked up a fishing game before. If you already are a fishing pro, though, there is plenty to keep your attention, including more than 200 types of bait, seven fishing regions around the world (each with multiple fishing spots), quests in which you must catch certain types of fish, rare boss fish that require special button commands to land, and online leaderboards. –**CHRIS H.**

Fire in the Sky

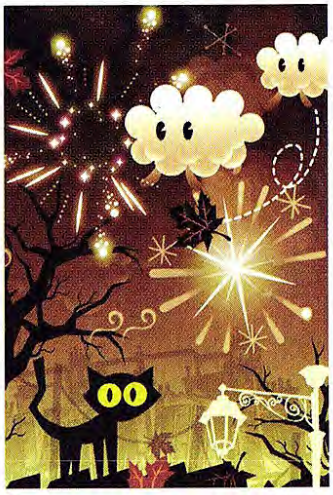
> BIG BANG MINI

PLATFORM: **DS** • PUBLISHER: **SOUTHPEAK INTERACTIVE**
DEVELOPER: **ARKEDO STUDIO** • RELEASE: **JANUARY 2009**

In most shooters your reward for destroying enemy craft is simply the knowledge that you're one step closer to saving the world/galaxy/your fellow hummingbirds (see Kolibri for the Sega 32X). But with Big Bang Mini, the payoff is a bit more visceral. Whenever you shoot down an opposing vessel in this bizarre blastathon from the makers of Nervous Brickdown, the top screen lights up like the Fourth of July. The more havoc you wreak, the more impressive the fireworks—it's like a pyrotechnic tribute to your ass-kicking skills.

Each of the game's nine worlds revolves around a different theme with its own distinct rules and adversaries, as well as unique abilities for your ship. In the icy Aurora world, for instance, you can draw a swirl on the touch screen to create a vortex that absorbs enemy projectiles. The comics-inspired New York stages, on the other hand, let you steal an opponent's weapon by tapping him with the stylus. Rounding out the offbeat festivities is a collection of appropriately peculiar bosses, including a psychedelic walrus that travels via flying carpet. It's only slightly less terrifying than it sounds. –**STEVE T.**

Monkeys with balloons, floating sphinx heads, giant skeleton puppets...and you thought the fireworks were extravagant during the opening ceremony for the Beijing Olympics. Boom goes the dynamite!



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Bakin' 'Bits

> ELEBITS: THE ADVENTURES OF KAI AND ZERO

PLATFORM: **DS** • PUBLISHER: **KONAMI**
DEVELOPER: **KONAMI** • RELEASE: **Q1 2009**

First-person perspective hide-and-seek shooter Elebits proved to be an apt application for the Wii remote's pointing feature. The sequel switches to the DS and gives you Phantom Hourglass-style tap-to-lead control over character Kai as he explores the home world of the electrically charged 'bits. You can manipulate rocks, trees, and other objects with Kai's Charge Gun to produce the squirrelly creatures: tap them to single them out, then send your companion Zero (an Omega Elebit) out to gather them up before a meter expires. If you manage to collect five or more creatures in one swoop, you'll earn more wattage, which you can use to activate doors and platforms, and power the Omega Elebits' special abilities, which include burning down barriers, freezing water, destroying rocks, and more. They're also instrumental in your efforts to survive boss battles. Multiplayer sessions for up to four participants are races to collect the most Elebits in the allotted time. The game is quite a bit different from its predecessor, but it retains enough of the original title's style and charm to pull in Elebits fans. –GEORGE S.

Fall and Rise

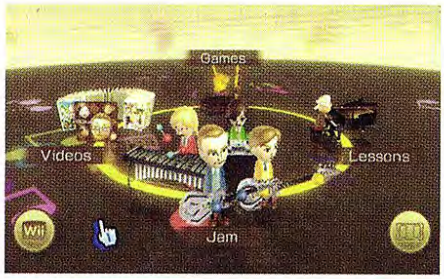
> PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE FALLEN KING

PLATFORM: **DS** • PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT**
DEVELOPER: **UBISOFT** • RELEASE: **DECEMBER 2008**

The Prince of Persia games have always been ingenious platformers, and the new DS adventure carries on the tradition. You wouldn't think a game like this would work with completely stylus-driven controls, but the prince still hops and climbs his way through Persia's haunted ruins with ease.

After some practice, the controls make perfect sense. Hold the stylus to the screen, and the prince runs in the associated direction. A quick context-sensitive tap, and he'll jump over a gap, roll under an obstacle, or drop to hang from ledges. To dispatch an enemy, simply tap the target—out comes the prince's trusty scimitar, and he'll lunge forward to close the distance if he needs to.

Though the graphics are 3-D rather than employing the rotoscoped sprites of the prince's early days, Fallen King has the spirit of the PC games that got the series started. It doesn't seem especially combat-intensive; the real challenge is in climbing walls, clearing gaps, and finding your way past some tricky deathtraps—old hat for the prince, but the DS controls make it feel like something new. –DAVID S.



In the Key of Wii

> Wii MUSIC

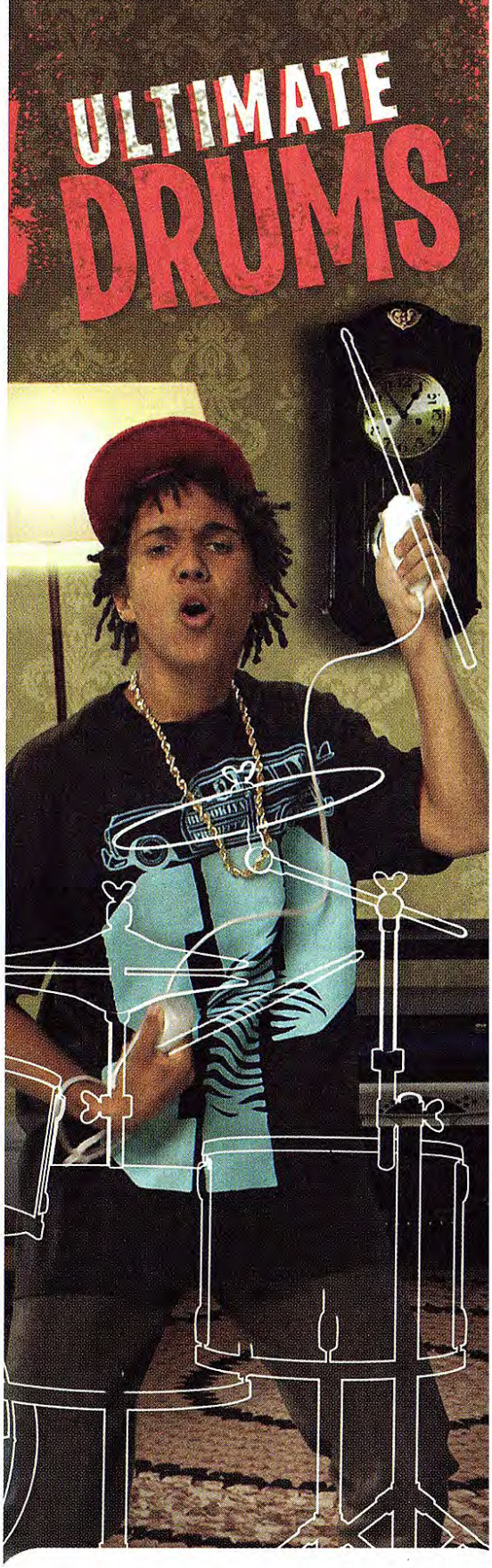
PLATFORM: **Wii** • PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **NINTENDO** • RELEASE: **OCTOBER 2008**

E3's Wii Music demo was so limited that it was hard to get our heads around exactly what the game was trying to do. But now that we've jammed with the full, final version, we're happy to say that we've finally gotten into the groove.

This title isn't anything like other music games—instead of rating your ability to hit a song's preset notes, Wii Music encourages you to add your own improvised touches by letting you play as few or as many notes as you want, whenever you want. But the game isn't music-creation software, either. Unlike Jam Sessions, Electroplankton, and KORG DS-10 Synthesizer (all for DS), you have almost no control over the key of the notes you play, although some instruments, such as horns, allow you to bend the pitch. When you deviate from a song's standard notes and timing, you never know exactly what your new notes will sound like—just that the game will keep them on the appropriate scale so that your improvisations never sound too off-key. Performances can be further customized by, for instance, swapping in any of the game's 60 instruments to play any part of any song.

Wii Music promises to be a big musical sandbox, and we can't wait to play in it some more. –**CHRIS SL.**

Sebastian Tute teaches from a long list of basic and advanced techniques.



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Choice Cuts

> SAMURAI SHODOWN ANTHOLOGY

PLATFORM: **Wii** • PUBLISHER: **SNK PLAYMORE**
DEVELOPER: **SNK PLAYMORE/TERMINAL REALITY**
RELEASE: **DECEMBER 2008**

Though the first two games in SNK's weapons-based fighting-game series are currently available on Virtual Console, don't overlook Samurai Shodown Anthology. A collection of Samurai Shodowns I through VI, Anthology is an excellent value—not only are some of these among the best fighting games ever made, but this is the first time Samurai Shodown VI has gotten a North American home-console release. Samurai Shodowns I-V are basic arcade versions of the game (though you can access their Practice and Versus modes in the main menu), but VI is a fully featured home release with its own Practice, Survival, Gallery, and Edit modes. As expected, you've got a variety of controller styles—remote alone, remote and nunchuk, and Classic controller—but unfortunately you can't use the GameCube controller. The actual fighting doesn't use motion controls, but there is a minigame in which you play as one of four series mascots and tilt the remote to move left or right, collecting coins and food while avoiding hazardous items. –JUSTIN C.

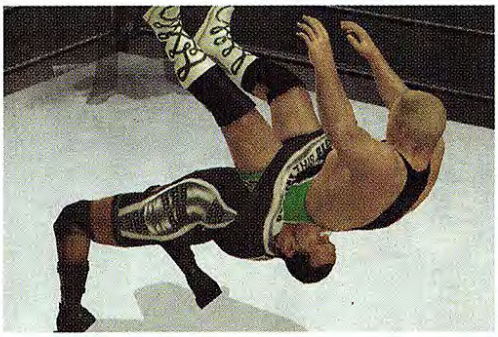
[Left] These are the kind of guys you would expect to see in a game called Samurai Shodown. [Above] These guys...not so much.

Gods Squads

> AGE OF EMPIRES: MYTHOLOGIES

PLATFORM: **DS** • PUBLISHER: **THQ**
DEVELOPER: **GRIPTONITE GAMES/ENSEMBLE STUDIOS**
RELEASE: **NOVEMBER 2008**

The gods of Egyptian, Greek, and Norse cultures inspire their subjects to develop armies and conquer enemies in THQ's first foray into the Age of Empires series. Though Mythologies takes its subject matter from PC title Age of Mythology, it uses the same turn-based battle engine as Majesco's The Age of Kings DS release. Three campaigns, four sets of scenarios, endless skirmishes, and multiplayer battles (both local and online) will have you gathering resources and building structures to train units, fight, and advance through the ages. The Egyptians specialize in building heavy defenses, whereas the Norse flood the field with aggressive warriors, and the Greeks take a balanced approach. Each culture has unique hero units (such as Brunnhilde the Valkyrie for the Norse), Myth units (like the Greek Minotaurs) and gods (such as the Egyptian Anubis) who are equipped to take on the masses. Your victories will earn you Myth Points you can use to unlock maps, heroes, relics, and more gods. –GEORGE S.

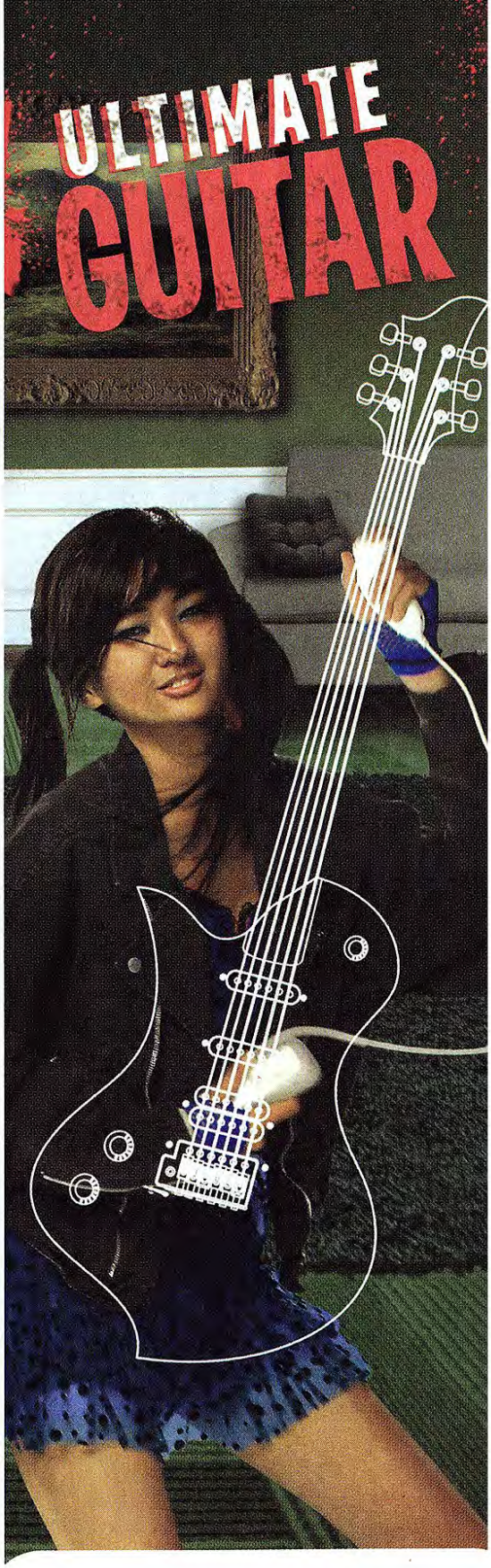


Lords of the Ring

> WWE SMACKDOWN VS. RAW 2009

PLATFORM: **Wii, DS** • PUBLISHER: **THQ** • DEVELOPER: **YUKE'S (Wii), TOSE (DS)** • RELEASE: **NOVEMBER 2008**

THQ is pulling out all the stops for the 2009 edition of its long-running SmackDown vs. Raw franchise. Not only does the Wii version feature the series' biggest character roster to date (including everybody from Santino Marella to Triple H), but it's packed with new modes and match types. Highlighting the experience are the new Road to WrestleMania modes, which feature unique, personalized storylines for a handful of WWE's top stars, such as Chris Jericho, CM Punk, and the Undertaker. If one of your favorites isn't getting top billing, no worries—you can use any superstar to go for the belts in Career mode instead. Refined motion controls and numerous small touches (such as customizable rosters and phone calls that come through the Wii remote's speaker) further add to the fun. The DS version of the game has a lot of depth as well, emphasized through its RPG-like story mode, which comes complete with equippable gear and customizable stats. –**CHRIS H.**



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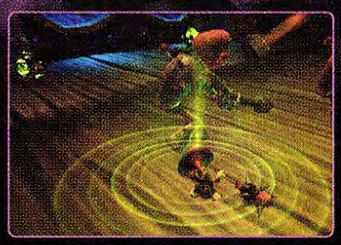

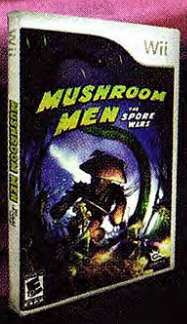

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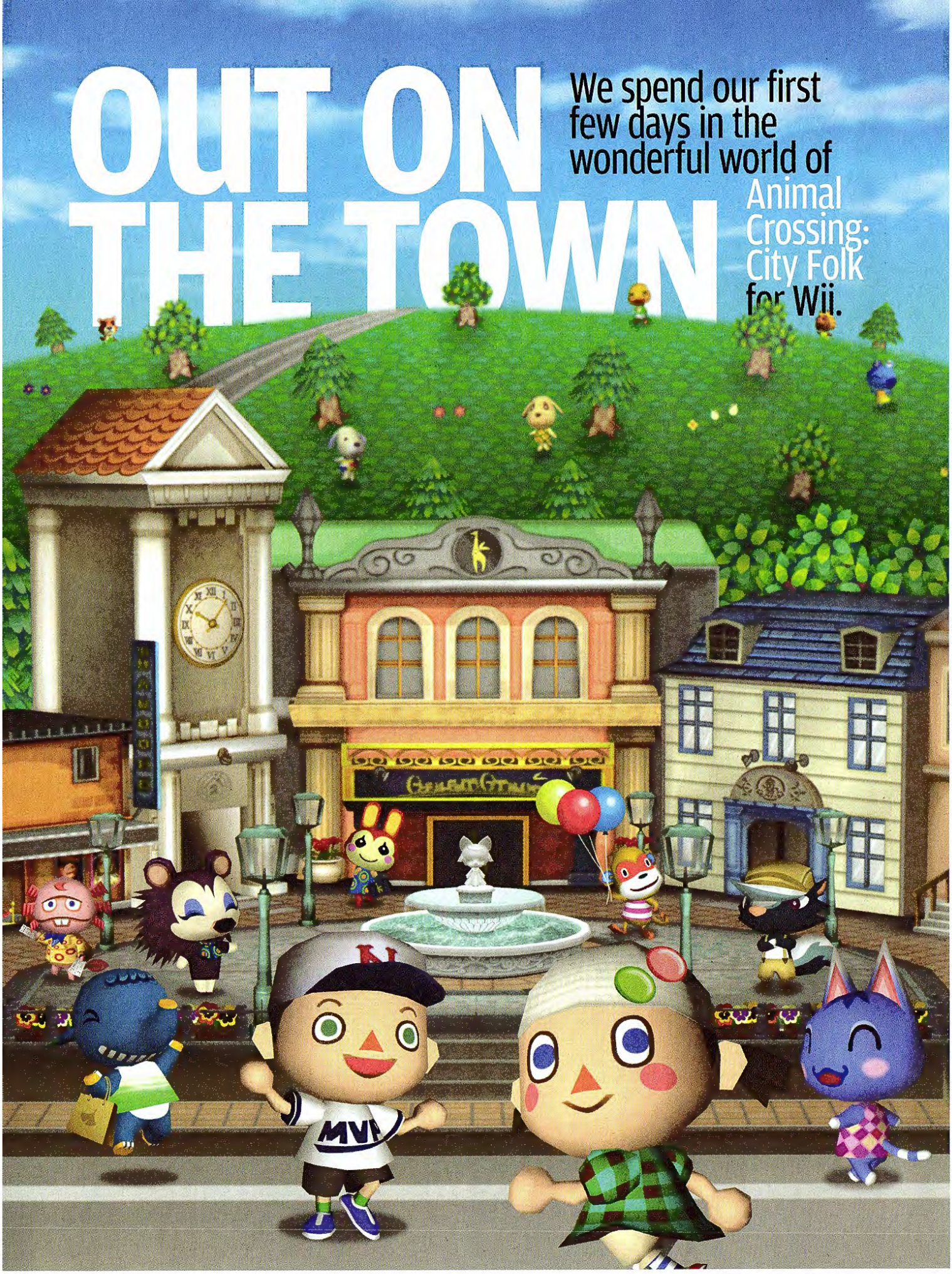
OUT ON THE TOWN

We spend our first few days in the wonderful world of Animal Crossing: City Folk for Wii.



BY ALAN AVERILL

AS A FORMER Nintendo employee who spent the last three years with the Treehouse localization group—the department that translates Japanese games for the North American market—I leapt at the opportunity to talk about Animal Crossing: City Folk. It's a title that my former coworkers are all very proud of, and this is my chance to see what the final product is going to be like. Since City Folk is heavily involved with both communication and the passage of time, this article is framed as a running commentary of the first four in-game days. Of course, this being Animal Crossing, your first days may be very different. But really, that's the beauty of the title—it's all up to you.

[Upper Left] You arrive in town flat broke. [Left] Shopkeep Tom Nook loans you the cash for a house, but now you have to put on his store's uniform and run errands. [Below] Meet the mayor.

I'm on a bus to town with two familiar faces: Kapp'n is driving, and Rover is asking me intrusive personal questions. The vehicle looks like an old school bus—a touch I find oddly comforting. After naming myself Dr. Rad and my town Crud, I step off the shuttle and into my new life. In less than five minutes I've chosen a house and begun my indentured servitude for the local shopkeep, an apron-wearing raccoon named Tom Nook, with whom returning AC players will be intimately familiar. This brief part-time job serves as a nice tutorial for newcomers and helps returning vets master the new Wii controls.

Speaking of controls, I'm using the nunchuk to walk, although you can make do with just the Wii remote (simply point at where you want to go, press A, and your character comes running). Motion controls are even included for select activities, such as fishing and chopping down trees. Various menus are accessible via a bar at the bottom of the screen that appears only when you point at it—a very nice touch. In the menus, you use the pointer to do most of your work, like equipping items and typing letters (a USB keyboard can also be used for the latter).

As I wander through my new village delivering packages and writing questionable notes on the bulletin board, I'm noticing how nice everything looks. The graphics are crisp, the colors bright, and I enjoy the way the world scrolls instead of moving in squares like the old GameCube game. City Folk didn't get a complete graphic overhaul, but AC vets will surely appreciate the extra little details.

Twenty minutes or so later, my jobs are done and it's time to explore my world at my own pace—but I'm a bit sleepy from all that work. More later.

[Left/Above] Your starter house is no mansion, but touches like a new floor will shape it up in no time. [Below] The second floor is just big enough for a bed, phone, and not much else.

I'm awake. Sweet. My house is small and I have only a box for company, so I decide to spruce up the joint. Stepping out of my home, I'm greeted by a neighbor—a large chicken who likes to punctuate his sentences with the phrase "Buh-kay." After some chitchat about the weather, he decides that a game of hide-and-seek is in order. Having nothing better to do with my long, lazy day, I heartily agree. Rules are explained, other hiders are drafted, and everyone scurries off to their respective lairs.

The game is pretty simple: I have to run around town and find the other players before time runs out. Despite my confidence, I'm surprised by what skilled hiders my new animal friends are. (How a massive chicken manages to squeeze behind a clump of trees is a mystery I will forever ponder.) I finally track down everyone with a few ticks left on the clock, which sets off a round of good-natured grumbling. As a reward for my brilliant seeking skills, the chicken hands me a bed. This is going to look fantastic in my empty front room.

All that seeking took it out of me, so I'm off to sleep on my new furniture. I'm starting to look like a real class act. Who knew?

HOLIDAY HIJINKS

A number of favorite holidays and events (such as the Harvest Festival, Halloween, and firework displays) are back in City Folk, but there are also plenty of new days to experience. Let's check out a couple.

FESTIVALE This all-day festival of color, costumes, and craziness is led by a fancy peacock named Pavé who just wants to dance. Oh, and get candy, which you can supply to him by participating in a wide variety of challenges from the local villagers. Number-guessing games, fake soccer matches, and tests of your innate psychic ability are just some of the activities you'll tackle.

BUNNY DAY A hyperactive rabbit named Zipper T. Bunny offers to sell you a shovel, asks you to bring him eggs, then goes crazy with happiness (and gifts, natch) when you comply.

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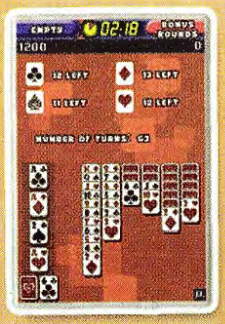

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CITY SLICKERS

In addition to the dozens of new villagers who can move into or visit your town, you'll see plenty of new faces in the brand-new city, including these fine folks.

KICKS Kicks the skunk can change the look and feel of your entire ensemble by altering your shoe color. This is a skill most of us would benefit from in real life.

LABELLE The long-rumored third Able sister makes an appearance as the floor saleswoman at the GracieGrace boutique in the city. Stories of her being on the outs with her sewing kin are apparently exaggerated.

PHINEAS Admit it. You've always wanted to run around town with a pinwheel. Well, now you can, thanks to a jovial fellow named Phineas who hands out accessories you can't get anywhere else. Did someone say *bubble wands*?

[Upper Left] The Able sisters return with stylish, affordable duds and free patterns that can be put on shirts, hats, walls, and more. [Above] Bug catching is once again a major pastime.

There's a green chameleon named Nat standing in front of the town hall. He's wearing one of those old-timey explorer hats that guys wear in jungle movies, and I quickly learn that he's in charge of an event called the Bug-Off—a name that strikes me as hilarious. (Wish I'd thought of that....) Since I have no net, I'm forced to purchase one from Nat for nearly all the money I earned harvesting shells and fruit earlier this morning. Ah, well. It's a nice net.

My hunt goes surprisingly well, and I end up scoring a massive butterfly. I briefly consider keeping the critter in my house instead of surrendering him to the contest, but the thought of winning is too much to resist. As I hand Nat my insect and walk away, he makes some comment about giving it a nice new home—although I think I see him licking his lips.

The rest of the day is a whirlwind of activity. My new friends are full of chatter if I want to talk, and ready with errands if I need to make some bells—the game's currency. At one point I get to fish for a house key that the red-eyed bunny lost. She claims that if I don't find it, she'll be forced to live in a box behind Tom Nook's store for the rest of her days. Not wishing that fate on anyone, I dredge up a key and claim my reward: a hat that makes me look like an old press reporter. Now I just need to find a mustache. Maybe I'll swing by the Able Sisters' place later to see what they have.

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All right. Enough of this quaint rural village. The game is called City Folk, right? Time to kick up my heels and head for the bright lights. I'm starting to think that my press hat may not be appropriate city attire, but seeing as how I blew all of my money on Brewster's delicious coffee this morning, it'll have to do.

The city is a quick bus ride away, and before I know it, the ride is done and I'm ready for my first look at the city—which is set up like a large town square surrounded by stores. The first thing I do is run into GracieGrace, a high-end boutique for fashionistas. (Actually, "high-end" might not be fancy enough. A few of the items here cost tens of thousands of bells.) I stare longingly at some truly amazing furniture, then leave when it becomes clear I can't afford a single thing.

Next I wander off to a theatre called The Marquee, where I decide to drop a few bells on a show. The evening's "entertainment" turns out to be a lizard named Dr. Shrunk, and his flop-sweat-filled act is truly something to behold. Shrunk makes a right mess of his routine, but as the curtain falls, I gain the ability to make an angry face anytime I want. This allows my character to look upset at the touch of a button—a skill I plan to use liberally.

There's so much to do in the city, I kind of lose myself for a while. I fiddle around with the automatic bell dispenser before coming to the sad realization that it won't extend me credit, then I stop by the Shampoodle salon for a makeover that lets me wear my Mii's face as a mask. Thus attired, I make my way to the Happy Room Academy headquarters, where a frantic salesman named Lyle offers to let professional decorators rate my room. Once I'm done there, I wander into the auction house to see if there's anything good to bid on.

My time in the city has flown by, and the sun is down by the time I'm ready to go. Exhausted, I return to Crud, flop on my bed, and start counting sheep of the nontalking, nondressing variety until I zonk out.

[Upper Left] GracieGrace has cool, hard-to-find items—but the prices are sky-high. [Above/Left] Change your hair or even your face by wearing a mask styled after one of your Miis.

FOUR DAYS IS BARELY ENOUGH TIME to get your feet under you in City Folk, and that's one of the things that make it such a unique experience. Many games today feel like a series of "wow" moments connected by a lot of filler, but this is different. It's composed of thousands of subtle, beautiful instances that add up to an amazing whole: a game that charms every time you turn it on, and a true sandbox experience where you can play for years and still find new things around every corner. It's a communication tool. It's a way to meet friends. It's a new life. And who couldn't use one of those every now and then?

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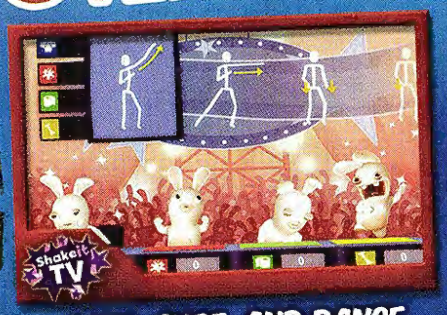

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HOW'S THIS FOR A JOB DESCRIPTION? Take a script that is thousands of pages long and localize it from Japanese to English. And since this is a game based on communication, it's not enough to simply translate one language to another. Jokes have to be rewritten. Personalities must be tweaked. Furniture, clothing, items, characters, and locations all need to be researched, named, and legally cleared. Frequent conference calls, videoconferences, and plane trips are required. To serve the needs of the majority of people in the North American market, you'll perform the same tasks for the languages of French and Spanish. Oh, and missing your deadlines is not an option. Welcome to NOA's Treehouse localization department.

We managed to squeeze half an hour out of the incredibly busy leads for Animal Crossing: City Folk—associate localization producer Ann Lin and producer/localization manager Reiko Ninomiya—and asked them what it's like to work on the biggest game Nintendo has ever localized.

NINTENDO POWER We heard that you worked until 3 A.M. last night.
ANN LIN Yeah.

How was that?
ANN It's kind of fun toward the end. You get loopy.

So everything written after midnight is awesome?
ANN Um...yes.

From a localization perspective, how big is City Folk compared to other games you've worked on?
ANN Well, AC is a communication game, so the heart of it is making relationships with animals in your town as well as your real-life friends. And in addition to that, there's a real-time calendar, so the world continues to evolve even when you're not there. So if you come in the morning, it's going to be different on the afternoon of that same day. If you play that game on a holiday, there's going to be holiday events. If you play it in the summer, there'll be summer-specific events and insects. And that's a lot of text.
REIKO NINOMIYA AC has always been about having this world where time transpires whether or not you're participating, and it adds a sense of charm. If you don't play for a while, your neighbors will miss you and actually get angry with you for not showing your face for a while. In regard to the bigness question, a big part of AC is customization. You can customize your character, but there's also customization of gameplay. There's so much to do in the world, you kind of create your own goals. So the possibilities are endless, if you will.

Is it the biggest game you've ever worked on?
ANN Yes, but not just with text volume. In every aspect. It's trilingual, it's a worldwide release...
REIKO It's in simultaneous development.
ANN Yeah, that. More text than Wild World, more events than Wild World....
REIKO More characters than Wild World....

How big is the localization team?
REIKO 18? Is that right? I'm counting desks. Wait, 19.

How long have you been working with the development team?
REIKO We started working on events in October of last year.

Events?
REIKO Yeah. So like on Halloween, there's a Halloween event. And for our market, there's a Thanksgiving event.
ANN And these events are actually customized per market. So Japan has some Japan-specific events, and Europe has some Europe-only events. So the events Reiko was talking about are events for our market where we had some input.

Do different markets have different clothes and furniture and things?
REIKO Some. The events have items associated with them, so it's more items associated with events. Like, there are a couple of items that only make sense in Japan. But there is [Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection] in the game, so you can play with other people and participate in those events and get those items, which is kind of cool.
ANN Oh, I also forgot Korea. Korea has their own set of wonderful and exciting events.

So what's an average day like at the beginning of the project?
REIKO In the beginning it's all about planning; going back and forth without actually touching the text files themselves. With AC we're really fortunate because we were so involved in the beginning with planning the events and helping to consult on characters. For example, when [the development team] was creating special NPCs, they asked us what would make sense in our market, so we even contributed on that level, too. So when we were working on that it was mostly communication over email and videoconferences. We even went to Japan before we got started just to make sure we're all on the same page, because we're also working really closely with Europe.

And an average day now?
ANN We're in testing now, so it's mainly fixing bugs.

What are some of the unique localization challenges you face in an AC game?
ANN I think the challenges are also the opportunities. Being able to give input early on is all really exciting. [In other titles] we used to be more about text and not have a lot to do with development. But AC is a really unique opportunity.
REIKO At the same time, there are challenges specific to AC, like just the sheer volume of text. And this time around, we went into it knowing that the text we were translating was probably not final, so we've been getting changes on a daily basis and have to make sure those changes are carried across all languages. That's a distinctly AC situation.

Who's your favorite new character in City Folk?
REIKO Pavé.
ANN I like Zipper T. Bunny.
REIKO Oh, yeah. He has cool items!
ANN He's this character that comes around on Bunny Day, and he asks you to find eggs that are hidden around town. And within the eggs are either candy or Bunny Foil—which is a winning ticket, if you will, that you can trade for special bunny-related furniture. But the coolest thing about him is that it's kind of unclear whether he's an actual bunny or just a guy in a mascot suit.
REIKO It's creepy-awesome.

Finally, if you could tell people just one thing about the game, what would it be?
REIKO Blood, sweat, and tears—buy it now! No, it's definitely one of those games that you can play across generations. I know people who use it, not as their main tool, but definitely as a tool to communicate with family members. I know with the DS version, people used it to play with their parents who lived across the country. It was a way of communicating that was different from traditional email or phone, but still really charming. I think that gives it something for everyone.
ANN I love how if you play a little bit every day, then every day you find something small and cool. The thing that's special is the element of discovery, and that's how things that might seem small in the overall context of this game become large and delightful and charming.

Great. Thanks for the time. Get some sleep.

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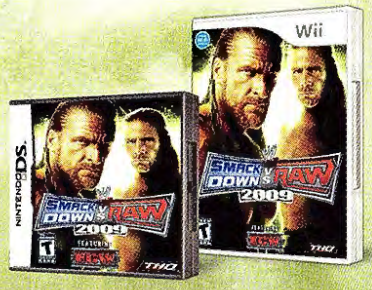

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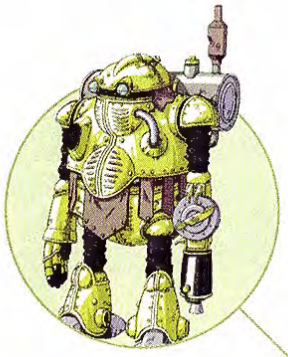


Square Enix's beloved RPG, Chrono Trigger, returns on DS with all-new features and enhancements.

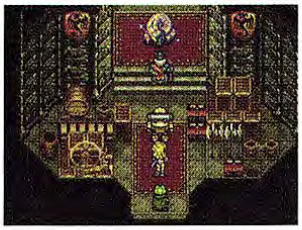
TIME and TIME again

In 1995, a legend was born. It was a legend about a swashbuckling boy, a freedom-loving girl, and a magic pendant. It was a legend detailing how knights of old fought back against a sinister Fiendlord and his monstrous army. It was a legend about a race of cavemen battling for survival in prehistoric times, and of a bleak future in which humanity struggled for its existence after a cataclysmic event. It was the legend of a planet that threatened to be torn apart by an unspeakably powerful force. It was a legend called Chrono Trigger, a role-playing game that pulled together all of those disparate elements to create one of the most enduring tales in video games—and it's on its way to the DS.

BY CHRIS HOFFMAN

Originally released on the Super NES (back when Square and Enix were separate companies), Chrono Trigger was something of a dream project, created through the collaborative efforts of some of the biggest names in role-playing games. Yuji Horii (creator of Dragon Quest) and Hironobu Sakaguchi (the mastermind behind Final Fantasy) acted as supervisors, while Akira Toriyama (character artist for Dragon Quest and creator of *Dragon Ball* and its many derivatives) designed the game's characters. Additionally, the game marked the compositional debut of Yasunori Mitsuda (who went on to be known for the soundtracks of games such as Xenogears), and legendary Final Fantasy musician Nobuo Uematsu also contributed to the score. Amazingly, Chrono Trigger lived up to its lofty pedigree with a whole that was more than the sum of its parts.

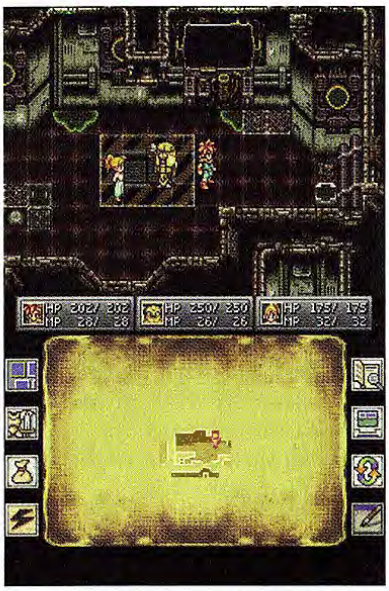
[Left] A convenient map on the lower screen shows you where you can go.



A TIMELESS ADVENTURE

The game begins simply enough, as a lad named Crono has a chance encounter with a feisty young lass named Marle while enjoying the Kingdom of Guardia's 1,000th-anniversary fair. You know how it goes: boy meets girl, boy falls for girl, girl gets sucked into a magic portal to who-knows-where during a freak science accident. Like any good hero, Crono follows, only to find himself 400 years in the past (the year 600 AD), where the forces of Guardia are waging battle against Magus the Fiendlord and his legions of beasts, and the queen has recently gone missing. Although Marle and Crono are quickly reunited, Marle disappears just as suddenly—evidently erased from existence by changes made to the era. Naturally, it's up to Crono to put things right by saving Marle, rescuing the queen, and maybe beating up a big, bad, beastie or 100 before heading back to 1000 AD.

In any other game, rescuing the damsel in distress could be the climax, but in Chrono Trigger it's just the beginning. Through a whirlwind series of events, the heroes find themselves on an epic, emotional quest to save the planet—one that takes them to the future (2300 AD), when the planet has been decimated and humanity huddles in domes, fearful of the mutants patrolling the roads; to the distant past (65000000 BC), when early human civilization is caught in a ceaseless struggle against a cold-blooded species known as Reptites; and to the Era of Antiquity (12000 BC), when islands float in the sky and magic permeates the air. Although early on you can move through time only at designated warp points, you eventually gain access to a time machine that lets you switch between eras at will, allowing you to change the past to affect the future in subtle and not-so-subtle ways.



[Right] During combat you can select your attacks, spells, items, and targets via the touch screen, or you can use traditional controls.

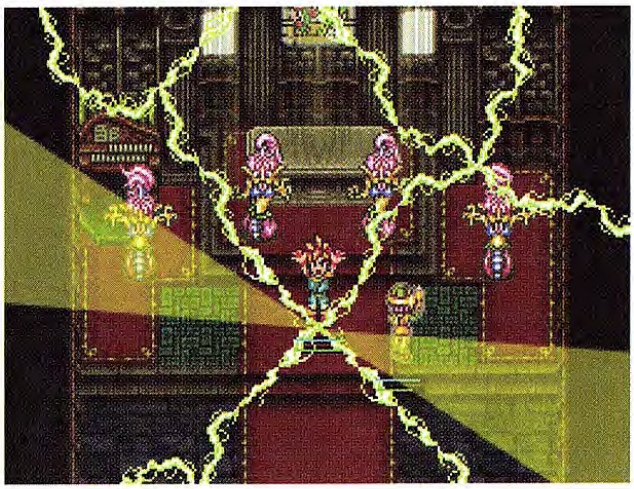
FIGHT FOR THE FUTURE

Though Chrono Trigger's innovative time-hopping gameplay (and the expansive worlds that go with it) sets it aside from other RPGs on the market, the personalities that aid you on your quest are what make the game so compelling. During your journey, you're joined by an assortment of diverse and memorable playable characters, including Lucca (Crono's brilliant inventor friend), Frog (a walking, talking warrior frog from the middle ages), Robo (a benevolent robot from the future), and Ayla (the powerful female leader of the cavepeople).

Each character is talented in his or her own right—for example, Crono is a gifted swordsman who learns to use light magic, Marle excels at healing and ice spells, Robo is a master of laser weapons, and Ayla is immensely strong and can charm items from enemies—but as a group they're even stronger. Characters learn Tech attacks (magic and special abilities) as they defeat enemies, and they're able to combine those techniques into Dual Tech and

Triple Tech attacks, such as the Fire Whirl (a combination of Crono's sword attack and Lucca's fire skills) and the Delta Storm (a potent mix of fire, water, and light magic).

And combination attacks are only one reason why the game's battles are so enjoyable. Based on the menu-driven active-time battle system (popularized by Final Fantasy IV through IX), combat is remarkably fast and fluid, and clashes take place directly on the field map without transitioning to a separate battle scene. The fights aren't random, either; it's possible to avoid most conflicts if you so desire.



Crono and his pals have plenty of powerful techniques at their disposal, including immensely strong combo attacks.

IN WITH THE NEW

While the aforementioned features make Chrono Trigger an incredibly deep experience, they ultimately result in the same game that RPG fans have been enjoying since the title's 16-bit debut (with the exception of a modified translation). Fortunately, there's plenty of new material added in to the mix. The developers have made thorough use of the DS's lower screen; during exploration it serves as a map, offers alternate touch-controlled means to move your character, and provides customizable shortcuts to access your equipment, items, Techs, and more. During battle your character data and attack options are also shown on the lower screen, leaving the upper screen to provide an uncluttered view of the action (although you can opt for the classic battle menus if you prefer).

Numerous features from Chrono Trigger's PlayStation remake are included in the DS version as well. A bestiary keeps track of enemies' strength and weaknesses, bonus maps reveal the locations of treasures, a sound test lets you groove to the game's amazing soundtrack, and gorgeous anime cut-scenes emphasize the adventure's most poignant moments.

More significant is the brand-new gameplay content. The battle arena (accessible from the title screen or from within the game via the End of Time) lets you train a monster, then pit him against foes in one-on-one combat. The training itself is automatic; you're simply required to give an item to your monster and send him off to one of the game's five eras (each of which enhances different stats), and after a while he'll return with his newfound strength. When you feel that your monster is ready to rumble, you can select from three tiers of competition or challenge a friend over a local wireless connection. Your monster acts automatically during combat based on his training, but you can provide him with items to increase his chances of victory.

Even more exciting are several new areas integrated into the main adventure. Halfway through the game, mysterious portals appear in prehistoric times and in the middle ages, both leading to an area called the Lost Sanctum. Consisting of a village, several field areas, and two full-fledged dungeons, the Lost Sanctum adds hours of fresh gameplay through multiple side quests that intertwine between the two eras.

Three additional Dimensional Vortex bonus dungeons open up once you've completed Chrono Trigger's main quest. We don't want to spoil everything, so we'll leave it at this: the dungeons feature new items, enemies, and bosses, and one of them even incorporates a fabled "lost" area that was reportedly planned for Chrono Trigger's initial release. Conquer all three Dimensional Vortices and you'll get the opportunity to square off against a brutal new final boss and witness a new ending (bringing the total ending count to more than 13).

Whether you've been a fan of the game since day one or you've never played an RPG before, there's plenty to enjoy about this time-traveling classic's DS rebirth. This November you'll get to experience Chrono Trigger like never before, and find out for yourself why it's become a legend in its own time.

[Left] After you send your monster off to train, he'll return with enhanced stats. He may even evolve or learn a new spell.

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STARS *of* DSTINY

The stars align on DS in **Suikoden: Tierkreis**, the latest chapter of Konami's popular RPG franchise.

BY CHRIS HOFFMAN

Since its debut in 1996, Konami's Suikoden series has been a favorite among RPG aficionados. Other role-playing games may have more flash, bigger budgets, and easier-to-pronounce titles, but when it comes to story, characterization, and level of sophistication, Suikoden is unmatched in its genre. The Suikoden games also have an addictive collection-oriented hook: by recruiting the diverse heroes collectively known as the Stars of Destiny, you'll build an army with an unprecedented number of unique characters. Suikoden: Tierkreis—the first installment of the series to come to a Nintendo system in North America—retains Suikoden's beloved core gameplay while making many changes to the formula, and the result is shaping up as one of the best original RPGs on DS.

Suikoden: Tierkreis starts with a bang—a fully animated cut-scene that depicts the defeat of the 108 Stars of Destiny by a masked, white-clad being called the One King. Panting and injured, with their downed comrades at their feet, the four still-standing Stars rally for one last-ditch strike against their powerful foe. As the four heroes attack, the One King retaliates with a blinding flash, and then...the scene changes to a peaceful, rural settlement called Citro Village. As in most of the Suikoden games, you take control of a young male protagonist (you choose his name) who seems like a typical lad—at least, as typical as it gets in a premodern world of swordplay and monsters. Along with his childhood friends Liu, Marica, and Jale, your hero is a member of the Citro Village Defense Corps, and he's ready and willing to embark on his first major mission: to eliminate some particularly rowdy wild beasts called Laggarts.

Other than the shocking events of the aforementioned anime sequence, the setup isn't far removed from that of previous Suikoden games. "We have stayed true to the design philosophy of Suikoden," says producer Masayuki Saruta (who was also involved with Suikoden IV and V). "Its design is comparable to previous Suikoden titles."

The Laggart-hunting expedition serves as a great opportunity to get familiarized with Tierkreis's controls and battle system. When exploring, you can move by either pressing the Control Pad or by dragging the stylus on the touch screen, and you make menu selections by tapping the screen or using the A Button. Battle commands are equally versatile, but the combat itself is surprisingly traditional: most enemy encounters are random, and battles are fought through a menu-driven interface.

As in most RPGs, standard attacks, magic, items, and defense are your bread and butter, but Suikoden also adds co-op attacks to the mix—maneuvers available to certain party-member combinations that inflict massive damage at the expense of taking additional actions in battle. And although the battle-party size has been reduced from the series' customary six characters to four, other nuances, such as short-, medium-, and long-range weapons, give the combat considerable depth.

"We wanted to make it four characters so that it is easier to see on the screen," admits Saruta. "Of course, we didn't just limit it to four characters [without variation]. It is also possible to change the formation of the front row and back row. And the player can add a support character [who provides benefits such as restoring HP or curing status ailments] to the battle party, and you can change the setting of that as well."

WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE

Although your hero's journey begins in a fairly benign manner, it

Suikoden's battle system is pretty traditional, but it's very fast-paced. You can choose an auto-attack option to make it go even faster.

Characters with strong bonds or similar fighting styles can team up to unleash co-op attacks. They're some of the most useful moves in the game.

[Below] These ancient ruins might not look like much, but they'd make a great headquarters.

Some areas of the game feature a conventional overworld map.

isn't long before you discover that strange things are afoot—forests and ancient ruins appear out of nowhere, seemingly invincible monsters roam the lands, and a mysterious book called the *Shining Legacy* bestows newfound strength and abilities called Marks of the Stars to certain people—including your hero and his friends—who come into contact with it. Shortly after you make these findings, reports surface of a girl who looks exactly like Marica wandering through the village brandishing a massive axe. When your hero and his allies look into the matter, they learn the surprising truth: the universe is composed of an infinite number of parallel worlds (known as the Infinity), and not only are people and monsters crossing between worlds through portals called Gateways, but the worlds appear to be converging.

Further investigation into the phenomena leads your party north to lands governed by the Order of the One True Way, a fatalist society guided by the belief that destiny is predetermined and unchangeable. And, unfortunately for their neighboring nations, the Order

believes that this destiny includes making everybody else live under their rule, whether they like it or not. (Their name also suggests a connection to the One King.) After you cross paths with the aggressive group, Suikoden's epic nature begins to take form—your hero and his allies find themselves at the forefront of a resistance movement against the Order of the One True Way, and you're soon recruiting new party members, forging alliances with neighboring countries, and watching your headquarters evolve and expand as your ranks continue to swell with the 108 Stars of Destiny. Doctors, innkeepers, scholars, blacksmiths, and others will join your cause, including people from far-off lands, each contributing their own visual motifs and cultural designs.

"There will be various types of ethnic and creature groups that will appear in the game, much like the previous Suikoden titles," Saruta states, "and so the origins of characters are not limited to one region. A lot of the inspiration behind the design of the worldview of the game and the characters was derived from a region off the Mediterranean coast."

MANY PLAYERS, ONE FUTURE

Much of the game's content might sound familiar to Suikoden veterans, but Tierkreis features many changes as well. Game progression, for example, is now mission-based; whether optional or essential, story-driven or not, every significant event in the game corresponds to a mission that you're rewarded for upon completion (which is very convenient, since enemies don't drop cash upon their defeat). Several Suikoden standbys are absent, too: you now buy new weapons instead of upgrading your existing gear, there are no True Runes, and one-on-one duels and strategy battles are missing in action (although there are multiparty skirmishes that take place during major battle campaigns). Even recurring characters that have appeared in every Suikoden game until now, such as magicians Viki and Jeane, are no-shows.

"This is a new game and it is completely different from previous Suikoden titles, so all the characters are new as well," emphasizes Saruta. "There are not any locations or stages from any previous Suikoden titles. The scene of the game is one of parallel worlds."

The parallel-worlds concept provides a convenient excuse for one of Tierkreis's most promising new inclusions: special quests in which you share characters with other players over Wi-Fi or a local wireless connection. Partway through the game, you meet up with a character who gives you the ability to send party members into the Infinity through a Gateway. Another player will then have the opportunity to receive your party member and use him or her to complete certain missions, such as defeating reality-crossing foes or

DON'T WAKE THE DEAD

Based on information provided by Konami for our news story last issue, we reported that a new resurrection system would be one of Suikoden: Tierkreis's gameplay elements. This feature, however, will not be included in the final game. "We had an idea of having this system at the beginning of game planning; however, [we] decided not to have this system," says producer Masayuki Saruta.

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participating in training exercises.

"The impetus for adding the online component was that I wanted to provide a new gameplay option [that fit with] the game story," Saruta explains. "Players can send their character online. Players who receive a character can in turn add him to their party. You can send your character to not just your friends but to random people in the world as well. There are two ways to get your character back: your character can be sent back by the player that has received your character, or your character will return automatically after a certain period of time."

YOUR DESTINY AWAITS

Tierkreis impresses in other ways, not the least of which is its visuals. Whereas the first two Suikoden games were almost totally 2-D and the subsequent games were purely 3-D, Tierkreis combines the two by layering 3-D character models on top of astonishingly detailed 2-D backgrounds. Cobblestone floors, dried herbs hanging above counters, ornate furniture designs, embroidered tapestries, craggy cliffs, gorgeous vistas, and light peeking through forest canopies (which actually affects your character model) are just a few of the intricate visual touches you'll encounter. The game's beauty is further emphasized by landscape drawings of your current area that adorn the upper screen, plus occasional anime cut-scenes.

The sound is getting the royal treatment, too—virtually every key scene is fully voiced (the number of voiceovers is staggering for a DS game), and one of the composers from previous Suikoden games is back on board to create the soundtrack.

Our experience with Suikoden: Tierkreis has thus far been very encouraging. Although the game seemingly came out of nowhere, it is a bona fide entry in the series, and it's worthy of the Suikoden name. The production values are arguably better than some of the franchise's console entries, and the payoff is likely to be one of the DS's most compelling RPGs when it hits stores this winter. But what about the game's title? We learned last issue that *tierkreis* is the German translation of *zodiac*, but what does it have to do with the Marks of the Stars and your hero's battle against the Order of the One True Way?

"The game's key words are the number *12* and *star*—zodiac. These words have an important meaning to the game," hints Saruta. "I can't reveal too much else at this time, but I hope players will enjoy and play this game and find out the secrets of Suikoden!"

PREVIOUSLY IN SUIKODEN

Though Suikoden has been casting its unique brand of role-playing magic for more than a decade, Tierkreis is the first game in the series to come to Nintendo systems or handheld platforms in North America. If you aren't familiar with the series, here's what you've missed.

SUIKODEN *(PS, 1996)*
In the first Suikoden game, players took control of a young man who led a rebellion against an oppressive empire. The game also came out for Sega Saturn in Japan.

SUIKODEN II *(PS, 1999)*
Though not a direct sequel to Suikoden, Suikoden II featured several returning characters and told another tale of rebellion, friendship, and betrayal. It's one of the most sought-after RPGs of the 32-bit era.

SUIKODEN III *(PS2, 2002)*
Suikoden III changed the formula by instituting four main characters with clashing viewpoints. They eventually joined together to fight an unlikely enemy—one of the heroes of the first Suikoden.

SUIKODEN IV *(PS2, 2005)*
Set 100 years prior to the previous Suikoden games, Suikoden IV took several steps back by offering fewer combat options and implementing sluggish naval combat.

SUIKODEN V *(PS2, 2006)*
Suikoden V put the series back on track with an epic story and improved production values. It told the tale of how a deposed prince took back his kingdom.

SUIKODEN CARD STORIES *(GBA, 2001)*
The only Suikoden game previously available for a Nintendo system was a Japan-exclusive card-battle game based on the characters and events of Suikoden II. A non-virtual Suikoden collectible card game was released in Japan, too.

LET THE BATTLE BEGIN!

FEATURING CAT CORA, ALTON BROWN, MASAHARU MORIMOTO, MARIO BATALI AND THE CHAIRMAN

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RANGER IN A STRANGE LAND

Something sinister is happening in the Almia region and only a brave Pokémon Ranger schooled in the techniques of befriending Pokémon can save the day!

Pokémon Ranger: Shadows of Almia for DS puts a unique, action-oriented spin on Pokémon gameplay. If you're familiar with the original Pokémon Ranger, you already know that the action revolves around the Capture Styler—a device that allows a Ranger to both befriend and capture a wild Pokémon by drawing circles around it rapidly using the DS stylus. But the game's fast-paced mechanics are just the beginning of its appeal. The Pokémon you befriend are the key to everything. By using their Field Moves you'll be able to dispatch obstacles in your path, and by employing their Poké Assists you'll be able to capture strong Pokémon and groups of Pokémon who might otherwise resist your efforts. Seventeen Partner Pokémon lend you their special abilities and everlasting loyalty, but you have to find them first. All of this is critical if you are to graduate from Ranger School, complete Missions and Quests, explore the breadths and depths of Almia, foil an evil plot, and rise to the rank of Top Ranger. Join us as we take the first steps into Pokémon Ranger: Shadows of Almia.

BY SCOTT PELLAND

YOUR ALMIA MATER

Almia's Ranger School is the first stop for anyone who hopes to become a Field Ranger. After choosing to play as a boy or girl, you'll meet your teacher, Ms. April, and your student Ranger classmates. Although the Ranger School is a tutorial level, the critical learning takes place less in the classroom than during episodic adventures with the other students. You'll explore the grounds, learn to use the School Styler to capture Pokémon by encircling them with your affection (Capture Styler technology amplifies your goodwill), and make friendships that will come into play later in the game. Although you'll continue to acquire skills long after leaving the Ranger School, you'll graduate with a fundamental knowledge of a Ranger's duties.

ALMIA REGION

Every corner of Almia holds secrets and new challenges. From mountain peaks to ocean trenches, you'll explore hidden paths where you'll encounter hundreds of different Pokémon. As in most Pokémon adventures, much of the region will be closed to you when you first set out, but once you've accessed an area you'll have the freedom to return to it during subsequent Missions and Quests.

VIENTOWN RANGERS

Following graduation, you'll visit your parents' new home in Chicole Village, near Vientown, before reporting to the Vientown Ranger Base, where your career as a Field Ranger begins in earnest. At the base, you'll meet the leader, Barlow, and the rest of the Ranger team, and while delivering newspapers (it's not all glamour and glory being a Ranger) you'll meet your first Partner Pokémon. Vientown is filled with colorful characters who present you with Quest opportunities and information. Your first real test takes place the day after you arrive at the Ranger Base; more Pokémon are behaving oddly at Marine Cave, near Nabiki Beach, and you need to find the source of the problem and rectify the situation. Before long, you and your fellow Rangers are caught up in a series of perplexing and dangerous events, such as the forest fire ignited in the Vien Forest while strange machines enrage the forest's Pokémon. You'll meet Professor Hastings then join forces with the other Rangers at the Ranger Union near Pueltown. Earth-shattering events await, and you'll be tested at each step.

THE CAPTURE STYLER REVEALED

The Capture Styler's primary purpose is to capture Pokémon, but that's not all that the amazing little device does. When you open the Capture Styler menu, you'll see a number of options, most of which let you access important information or controls and settings. You'll be able to browse through data on the Pokémon you've captured, release Pokémon from your team, check your Styler status, save your progress, view a map of the Almia region, see all your Styler upgrades, review Missions and Quests, and set a number of game settings. It should come as no surprise that such an important tool also holds the key to your fate—if the Capture Styler runs out of power, your game will end and you'll have to start over from where you last saved your progress.

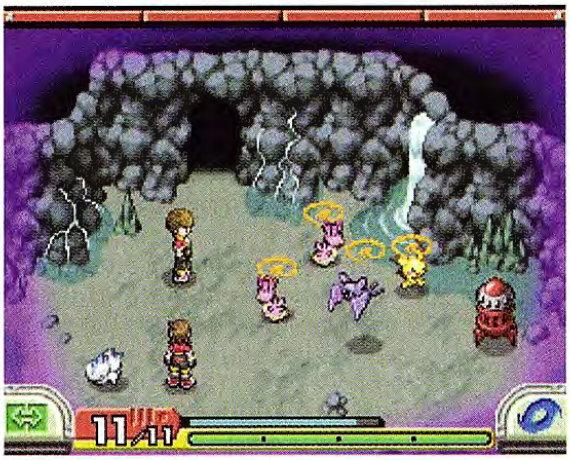
Graduation Day comes all too soon, but before you get all misty-eyed, two Tangrowth threaten to spoil the celebration. Are you Ranger enough to capture them?

Inside a Ranger Base, you can learn about Missions, save your game progress, and power up your Capture Styler.

Sometimes a Field Move isn't enough to deal with a big problem. Blastoise's Rain Dance is an Area Move, so maybe it can put out the forestwide blaze if you can find the right place to use it.

Completing Missions earns you experience, which in turn raises your Ranger rank. And an increase in rank might increase the number of Pokémon on your team or earn you a new Poké Assist.

The machine in the cave seems to be the source of the Pokémon's odd behavior; you'll have to search for a Pokémon that has the right Field Move to destroy the machine.



You can keep track of your Quests by accessing the Quest option in the Capture Styler menu.

A RANGER'S WORK IS NEVER DONE

The difference between a Mission and a Quest is that you must complete Missions to move the plot along, whereas volunteering to take on a Quest is completely up to you. Almia's citizens have a host of problems that only a Ranger can solve, such as removing objects from paths or finding lost Pokémon, so after talking to someone and accepting their Quest, you can take a breather from the serious business of saving Almia and simply help someone in need. As a reward for your generosity, you'll earn Capture Stylus upgrades that enhance some aspect of your Capture Styler, such as its Defense rating.

TEAM DIM SUN

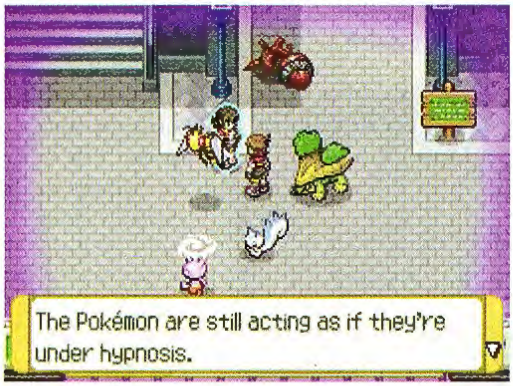
Newspaper accounts have described strange goings-on throughout Almia, and sightings of mysterious figures dressed in black. But you won't meet members of Team Dim Sun face-to-face until you arrive in Pueltown, and then you'd better be ready for a fight. Learning that Team Dim Sun has been planting the strange, Pokémon-maddening machines—known as Gigaremo units—is just the tip of the iceberg. Even if you beat the Team's Rattata and Toxicroak, Team Dim Sun will give you the slip for now.

KEEP A LOOKOUT

Pokémon Ranger: Shadows of Almia is coming this November, offering a breath of fresh air to Pokémon fans. Featuring the active, skill-based use of the Capture Styler, the depth of an adventure RPG, improved stylus controls and graphics over the original Ranger, tons of Pokémon to capture, a fun and often humorous story, and surprises at every turn, Shadows of Almia looks as fabulous as the view from Lookout Ridge.

Toxicroak is a tough customer; you have to be prepared to slow it down with an effective Poké Assist and be particularly fast with your Capture Styler.

Pueltown is under siege by Team Dim Sun. The Gigaremo Units are stirring up trouble among the local Pokémon.



Bad guys just can't help spilling the beans about their nefarious schemes.

SPECIAL RANGER OPS

Special opportunities await Pokémon Ranger: Shadows of Almia players in the months ahead. Two exclusive Special Missions—*Recover the Manaphy Egg!* and *Rescue Kidnapped Riolu!*—will be distributed over Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection only until January 31, 2009. (Check Pokemon.com and Nintendowifi.com for more info.) You can access the Missions when you go to the RangerNet from the Start menu. Once you've recovered the Manaphy Egg, you can transfer it to your copy of Pokémon Diamond or Pokémon Pearl for hatching. And if you rescue the special Riolu that knows the Aura Sphere move, you can transfer it to Diamond or Pearl, where you can use it in battle.

And if you like Riolu, don't miss a two-part Pokémon Ranger episode airing on Cartoon Network on November 1st and 8th, which features Ash and Top Ranger Kellyn trying to rescue a kidnapped Riolu that knows Aura Sphere.

NEWS FLASH!

POKÉMON FAN NEWS EXTRA!!!

At all Toys"R"Us stores in the US on November 8th and 9th from noon to 4pm, Pokémon Diamond and Pokémon Pearl owners will be able to score a powerful Level 50 Dragonite preloaded with an amazing arsenal of moves (some of which can't be learned until after Level 50), including Outrage, Dragon Dance, Thunderbolt, and the ultimate Dragon-type move, Draco Meteor. And because you get this Dragonite at Level 50 it can enter official tournaments limited to Level 50 Pokémon! The exceptional Dragonite also comes equipped with the Yache Berry Hold Item that halves the damage inflicted by super-effective Ice-type moves used against Dragonite.

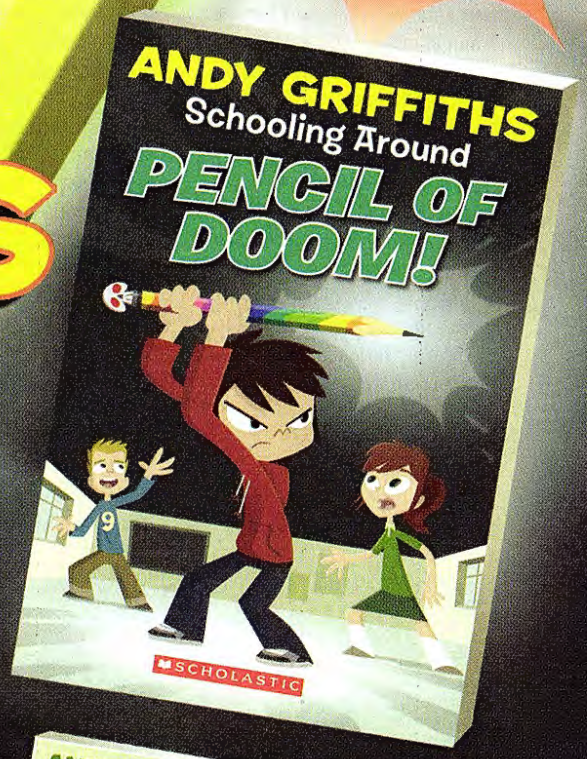
As an additional bonus, a Pokémon Ranger: Shadows of Almia poster will also be handed out during the event.

YOU'LL NEED THE WRITE STUFF TO ERASE THIS PENCIL!

Schooling Around PENCIL OF DOOM!

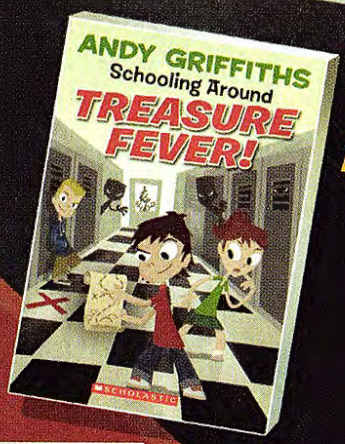
From the *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Day My Butt Went Psycho!*

ANDY GRIFFITHS



When the drawings from his pencil start to come true, Henry McThrottle thinks his pencil is special. But he'll soon find out his pencil is using its power for evil! Now Henry and his friends must erase the pencil once and for all...or else.

In bookstores now!



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They Said It Here

INTERVIEWS with the top talents in the video game universe are a welcome source of fresh insights and colorful quotes. Our monthly Power Profiles are fascinating excursions into the world of game development, but Nintendo Power was connecting with influential game makers for years before we conceived Power Profiles. This month we're going in search of some of the most interesting, weird, wonderful, and memorable interview quotes from NP's first two decades.

BY SCOTT PELLAND

A RARE APPEARANCE (1)

The magazine's first interview (appearing in September/October 1988) featured Chris and Tim Stamper of Rare Ltd. At the time, the Stampers had already produced 25 games, including NES hits Wizards & Warriors and R.C. Pro-Am Racing. Among other fascinating biographical nuggets, readers learned that Tim was involved in breeding horses, and that the best part of being successful was that "someone else can clean out the stalls." Thanks to Tim, the world finally had a true measure for success.

MOTHER'S FATHER (2)

Shigesato Itoi's career spans television, print, and video games, and as the creator of the Mother franchise (known as EarthBound in North America) he is one of the most idolized game developers of all time. When NP asked Mr. Itoi about his favorite video game genre in a July 1995 interview, he replied in typically candid fashion that he preferred RPGs: "An RPG is the only kind of game you can put down when you want to get something to eat or go to the bathroom."

MIYAMOTO SPEAKS (3)

No person defines video games as much as Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto—the celebrated creator of Mario and Zelda—and it has been NP's great privilege to speak with Mr. Miyamoto on many occasions. In our January 1996 issue, Mr. Miyamoto shared his philosophy at the dawn of the N64 era: "Before, in earlier games, we couldn't show the entire game world in detail and we couldn't convey all the emotions of the characters. Now, we can do that on the Nintendo 64. I've always wanted to create realistic experiences, full experiences such as you or I could have, but in exciting worlds." It is pretty clear that he's never wavered from that dream, and we can all be thankful for that.

LET'S CHANGE THE SUBJECT, PLEASE (4)

When NP took a combative tone while investigating reports that Interplay's Clay Fighter 63 1/3 was a shameless parody of a respected genre, the game's director, Jeremy Airey, proved to be as slippery as Bad Mr. Frosty.

POWER: Yeah, we get it. It's a clever ruse to deceive fighting fans with familiar gags. Before you know it, KI and MK players will abandon the arcades to hang out in stand up comedy clubs. Well, not on our watch, mister.

AIREY: You've got it all wrong. Clay Fighter 63 1/3 is not just about the humor. It's a strong fighting game that just happens to use slapstick rather than drama as the visual medium. Let's talk about the engine.

Smooth, Jeremy. Very smooth.

MIYAMTO'S FORMULA FOR SUCCESS! (5)

In our August 1998 issue, Shigeru Miyamoto shocked us by revealing his closely held secret to success: "My formula for success is that 70% of the game should have to do with objectives and the rest should be secrets and exploration—things such as burning trees to find a hidden dungeon entrance like in the first Zelda game." Wannabe game designers, write this down: 70% objectives, 30% scorched trees!

CONFESSION OF A SICK PUPPY (6)

3DO's technical lead Dan Geisler admitted to his sordid childhood practice of melting plastic army men with a magnifying glass in an August 1999 profile of 3DO. "You just can't beat reducing a lowly radio guy to a smoldering blob with a magnifying glass," said Geisler. Perhaps it is a small measure of justice that 3DO itself suffered a meltdown a few short years later.

WHEN GREAT ISN'T GOOD ENOUGH (7)

"We would work on something for a week and quickly achieve

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OF NINTENDO POWER

#11 IN OUR YEARLONG CELEBRATION OF NINTENDO POWER'S CLASSIC MOMENTS

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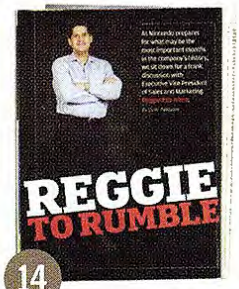

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results that looked better than we were seeing others do on the Xbox or PS2." Thus spoke Denis Dyack, president of Silicon Knights, regarding what he saw as the GameCube's technical superiority compared to the other game consoles. Personally, I blame the GameCube's woes on its handle. No matter how sophisticated the electronics are, if you stick a big handle on something, people are going to think it's a toy.

GREATEST METAMORPHOSIS (8)

When Sega's Yuji Naka revealed that Sonic got his start in life not as a hedgehog but as a rabbit, you might have thought that was shocking. But a more provocative transformation was that longtime rivals Sega and Nintendo were combining forces for the first time, and the most shocking quote from our October 2001 interview with Mr. Naka was this: "I'd like to see Sonic and Mario give each other a hug." Would sharing title space in the same game count?

SPAWN PATROL (9)

In December 2003's Developer Profile (in Game Watch) Todd McFarlane talked about bringing Spawn to a video game setting: "Everybody wants to pay homage to [the comic], but I say, no, that worked with comic books, but we're not doing comic books. We're doing a video game here...." To whoever is working on the next Superman game, you could learn something from this guy.

THE STORY OF MY LIFE (10)

David Doak, Free Radical's director of Second Sight for GameCube, proved to be a master of understatement when he described the game's protagonist, Vattic: "He's just your average guy who has somehow acquired awesome powers and found himself caught up in a psychic conspiracy."

TOUCH GENERATIONS (11)

SonicTeam's Yojiro Ogawa (producer for Feel the Magic: XY/XX) revealed ambitious plans for his Nintendo DS title in a January 2005 interview. "What we were looking to do was create a game with movielike elements in which to win the attention of a beautiful woman—and, ultimately, to go out with her." Sure, it may sound like a supergeek fantasy, but you've got to hand it to Yojiro for thinking big.

HE SHOULD KNOW (12)

Suda51 spoke to NP for the April 2005 issue, which featured his Killer 7 on the cover. A great deal has been written about the nature of video games as an art form. Here's what Suda51 said: "It is my firm belief that video games are the most challenging form of artistic media we know." At the very least, that is true of his games.

THE ZELDA CONNECTION (13)

The long-running Inside Zelda feature concluded with a four-page interview with The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess's director, Eiji Aonuma, in January 2007. Mr. Aonuma spent quite a bit of time explaining the complexities of turning Twilight Princess into a Wii title: "...If we were creating the controls for a Wii Zelda game completely from scratch, the process would present a totally new challenge, and the result could potentially be something thoroughly new. I would really like to try it." As would we!

THE REGINATOR (14)

Prior to the launch of Wii, NP wrangled some time with Reggie Fils-Aime (who was on his way to becoming Nintendo of America's president) for an interview in our July 2006 issue. Reggie covered just about everything, from why the GameCube had a tough time to why he thought Wii would be a success. "I think once...you've given the Wii controller a chance, you'll find that it really is a much more immersive way to play and be won over." Keep in mind that the interview took place prior to E3 2006—Wii's first hands-on public trial. His words turned out to be truer than anyone could have imagined.

THE FINAL WORD (15)

The Power Profiles column was one that both Steve Thomason and I had wanted to include in Nintendo Power for some time. When we finally got started on the project, only one name was on our minds for the first interview: Mr. Miyamoto. In the June 2007 issue, Nintendo's legend told NP readers how he got started making games, what inspired him, and how he worked through tough problems. He stressed the importance of real-world experiences: "As you create and try to flesh out a project, it's very important for you to kind of reflect back on your own experiences." That's a philosophy we can all benefit from.

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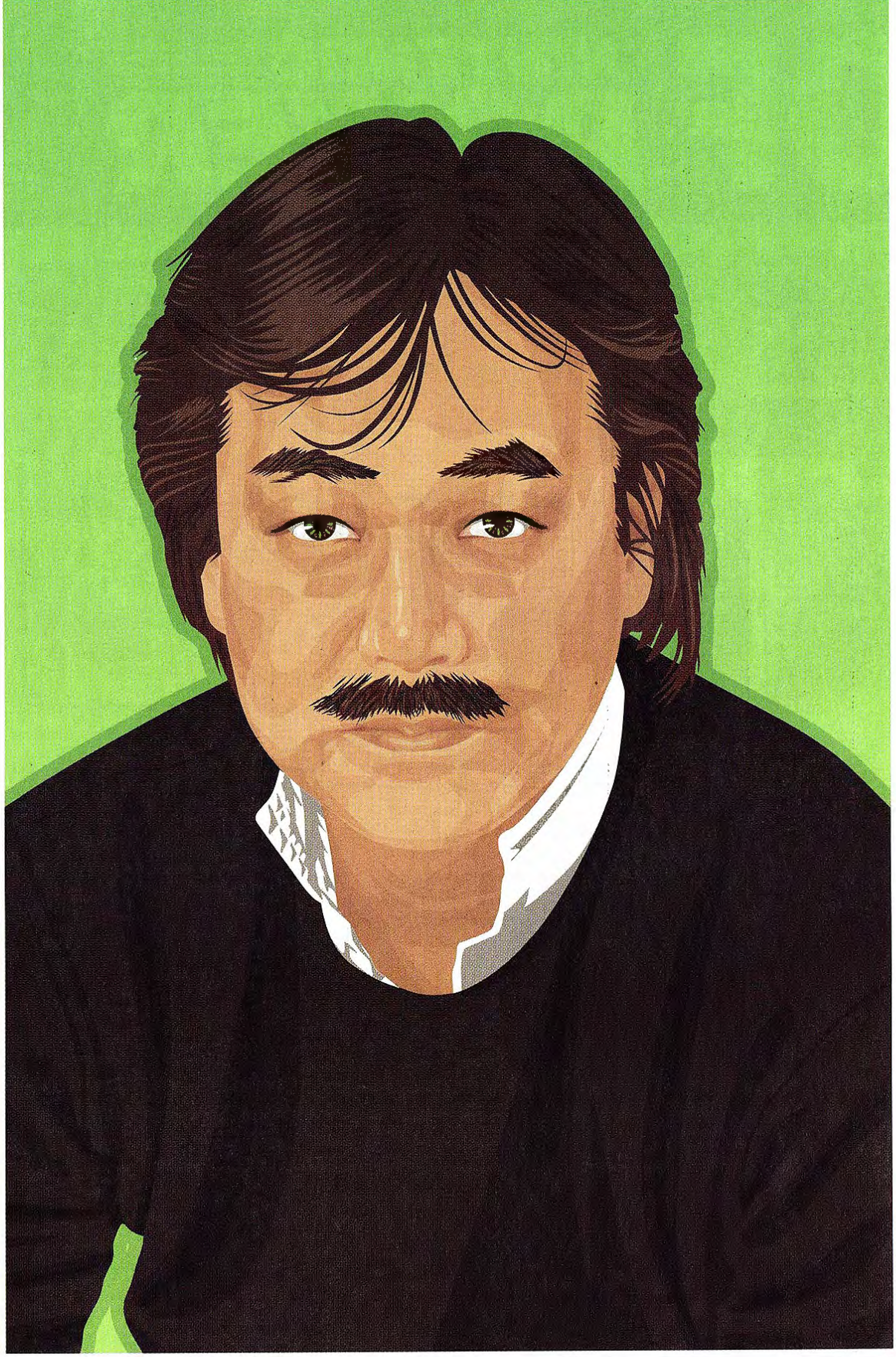
Power Profiles



DATE OF BIRTH
November 25, 1962

BIRTHPLACE
Hitachi City, Ibaraki Prefecture, Japan

POSITION
CEO of Mistwalker Corporation

BEST KNOWN FOR
Creating Final Fantasy, his sweet 'stache

FAVORITE FOOD
XO sauce

CURRENT PROJECTS
AWAY: Shuffle Dungeon, Blue Dragon Plus, other confidential projects

Hironobu Sakaguchi

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRISTINA EMPEDOCLES

Do you remember when Palom and Porom sacrificed themselves in Final Fantasy IV? Or Celes's touching opera-house performance in Final Fantasy VI? What about Sephiroth plunging his sword into Aerith in Final Fantasy VII? It's hard to forget such classic RPG moments, and none of them would have existed if it weren't for the creative genius of Hironobu Sakaguchi. One of Squaresoft's first employees, Sakaguchi is the man responsible for creating the renowned Final Fantasy series and many of the intricate worlds and adventures that go with it—a fact that was recognized when he was inducted into the Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences Hall of Fame. Following his stint as writer and director of the 2001 CG-animated film *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within*, Sakaguchi surprised many by leaving his position as executive vice president and forming a new game-development studio called Mistwalker. Now with more creative freedom than ever before, Sakaguchi is still focused on creating unique, moving, and innovative RPGs—his most recent project being Majesco's AWAY: Shuffle Dungeon for the DS.

NINTENDO POWER
How did you get into the video game business?
HIRONOBU SAKAGUCHI When I was in college I did some part-time work for Square during spring break, and just like that I got sucked into the world of game production.

When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?
A musician.

How has the gaming industry changed since you started?
As an industry it's really exploded, but the fact that the games only have meaning because of fan support remains the same.

Where did you get the idea for Final Fantasy? What were your inspirations, and how did you want to make it different from other games that were out there?
[The inspiration came from] games like the Wizardry and Ultima series that I played on the Apple II. They were a kind of culture shock for me. My goal for Final Fantasy I was to make an RPG I would be satisfied with, given the constraints of the NES.

Can you explain the origins of the Final Fantasy series' title?
It refers to the last figment of imagination that you see—your truest dream, or something like that.

What is your personal favorite Final Fantasy game and why?
It has to be Final Fantasy I. That's where it all started.

Western RPGs and Japanese RPGs have always been very different. What do you think the key differences are, and why do you think those differences exist?
The target audience. In Japan, the RPG genre has been accepted as a genuine form of entertainment for the masses. And I guess the influence of Dragon Quest has been big.

What made you decide to leave Square and open your own studio, Mistwalker?
I wanted to get back to being a creator rather than being the manager.

How are things different now that you're running your own independent studio? What are some of the advantages and disadvantages?
The advantage is that I can truly devote myself to game production, and the disadvantage is that I can sometimes get incredibly lazy. I constantly have to remind myself not to be lazy.

You've spent most of your career involved with RPGs. What do you like about the genre?
I think it's because I've always liked games that have a story.

Let's say you're playing a hypothetical RPG. What character class would you choose for your main character and why?
I'd choose a female bard. Perhaps it's because I enjoy sitting back and playing a supportive role in an RPG.

What do you believe the advantages are of video games as a storytelling medium?
I think the advantages are characters that you can really get absorbed in, and also a "tale" or story that really comes to life. The story structure can go one way, help you reflect on yourself, and then go in a different direction; it's constantly changing.

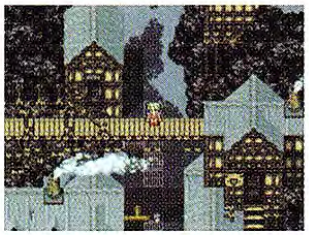
How is your recent DS title, AWAY: Shuffle Dungeon, different from other games you've worked on?
It was a collaboration with Mr. [Naoto] Oshima, who has mainly worked with action games, so that was the major difference. With this collaboration, I

GAMEOGRAPHY

Although Sakaguchi is most closely associated with the Final Fantasy games (we don't have space to show them all), he's also worked on many other high-profile projects, including Mario's RPG debut.

THE DEATH TRAP
PC, 1984
DIRECTOR

FINAL FANTASY
NES, 1990
ORIGINAL CONCEPT



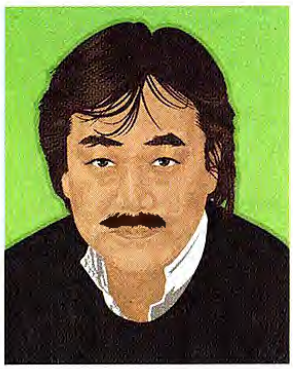
FINAL FANTASY III (FINAL FANTASY VI IN JAPAN)
SNES, 1994
PRODUCER

SUPER MARIO RPG: LEGEND OF THE SEVEN STARS
SNES, 1996
PRODUCTION SUPERVISOR

RAD RACER
NES, 1987
SUPERVISOR

CHRONO TRIGGER
SNES, 1995
SUPERVISOR

Power Profiles



feel that we were able to bring out the best of our respective abilities, and beautifully meld them together.

How have you managed to keep the Shuffle Dungeon concept fresh for the duration of the game?
We really pushed to fill it with new idea after new idea. Of course, there's also the excitement of leveling up and a lot of things happening in the story.

"[My favorite] has to be Final Fantasy I. That's where it all started."

Do you prefer working with small teams like the ones creating AWAY and Blue Dragon Plus (for DS) to the large ones that created Lost Odyssey and the original Blue Dragon? Are you able to get more personally involved in smaller projects?
I'm involved in just about the same way in either case. In the beginning I get deeply involved in producing the story and concept. Then toward the end, once we've got everything put together, it's incredibly important to do testing and make the necessary adjustments.

You've collaborated with many other notable game creators in your time, such Mr. Oshima on AWAY. Are there any developers you've especially enjoyed collaborating with, or ones whom you would like to collaborate with but haven't yet?
It was a lot of fun to work with Artoon, for both Blue Dragon and AWAY. They were uncompromising with their effort and insight, and I think it was worth all the hard work.

What aspect of creating a video game do you enjoy the most?
I like working together with people as a team. On some level it's a lot like sports. You get the same feeling of elation as a team taking part in a tournament, moving forward with each win.

If you weren't making games, what do you think you'd be doing?
I would definitely want to be involved in the creation of something, no matter what it was. Maybe I would've been in a laboratory somewhere, coming up with things no one would ever imagine.

When you're stumped by a particularly difficult problem while creating a game, what's your process for working through it?
First, I just think deeply about it. Then I try out a few ideas without worrying whether they will work or not. I throw out what doesn't work, and then build on whatever is left shining at the end. And there's also the possibility that some idea I threw out initially can be reinserted into the mix, essentially being brought back to life. In short, it's just trial and error.

What other games or game creators do you most admire or respect, and why?
[Games like] Heiankyo Alien, Gauntlet, and TwinBee—it always amazes me that people were able to make games like that.

Whose works in other forms of media, such as film or literature, do you most admire or enjoy?
Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak, the geniuses behind the Apple II computer. Everything I am now is thanks to that initial culture shock I experienced on the Apple II.

What is your favorite hobby or pastime?
Music, photography, surfing, and spending time with my dog.

If you could have one superpower, what would it be and why?
It would be the power to fly in the air, because beyond just allowing me to fly, I feel it might even change my view of life.

GAMEOGRAPHY

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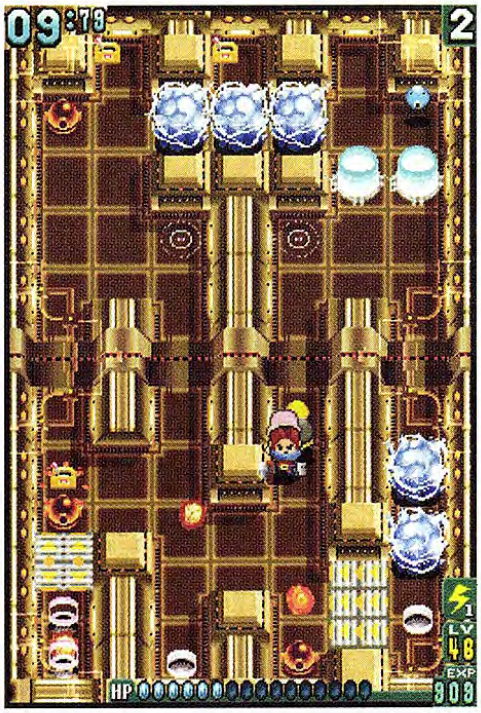
PLAYSTATION, 1997
DIRECTOR, ORIGINAL STORY

KINGDOM HEARTS
PLAYSTATION 2, 2002
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER



AWAY: SHUFFLE DUNGEON
DS, 2008
SCENARIO, GAME DESIGN

FINAL FANTASY X
PLAYSTATION 2, 2001
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

BLUE DRAGON
XBOX 360, 2007
GAME DESIGN

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BLASTER MASTER

It's not easy being green...and lost in an underground cavern.

Innocent mutant jellyfish, or sly nod to what undoubtedly inspired this game?

PLATFORM: **NES**
DEVELOPER: **SUNSOFT**
PUBLISHER: **SUNSOFT**
RELEASE DATE: **NOVEMBER 1988**
COVERED IN ISSUES: **1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6**
SIPS OF PLUTONIUM TO MAKE THESE MUTANTS GO WILD: **1**

Plumbers got to save princesses, and if you were a bad enough dude, you got to rescue the president. What did Jason, the youthful protagonist of Blaster Master, get to liberate at the end of his arduous journey? A frog. A lousy frog.

It seems that our hero was playing with his pet frog, Fred, when the amphibious troublemaker made a break for it. Outside, Fred grew many times his size after leaping onto a container of radioactive waste that Jason's family apparently kept in their yard. The newly enlarged Fred leapt down a conveniently placed hole, leaving Jason no choice but to pursue his wayward pal. Finding himself in an expansive subterranean cavern, Jason procured an armored tank (that happened to be waiting at the bottom of the hole) and set off to battle the hordes of mutants that had presumably taken Fred hostage.

Quite a story, eh? Despite the heavy "huh?" factor of the narrative, Blaster Master is an outstanding title. The game is structured similarly to Metroid or the recent portable Castlevania adventures. Instead of being broken into multiple levels, Blaster Master is set in one large world composed of several areas, most of which aren't accessible until a particular boss is defeated, granting Jason the proper upgrades to his tank (SOPHIA, to use its proper name).

A couple of different perspectives add variety to the lengthy mission. Most of the exploration is done within SOPHIA from a side perspective, but to find certain power-ups and defeat bosses, Jason must exit his tank and head into dungeons that are shown from a near-overhead view. During these segments, our boy wields an upgradable gun and a stockpile of grenades.

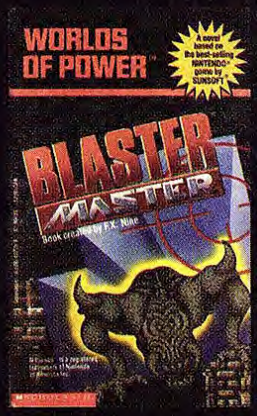
If you've ever managed to beat the game, you should still be bragging about it. With its relentless enemies, limited lives and credits, and lack of a password or save system, this is one of the most difficult games on the NES. It's still worth playing, though, as the graphics, music, and level design are some of the best on the system. –**PHIL T.**

No, this has nothing to do with Beyond Thunderdome.

READ ALL ABOUT IT

During the height of the NES's popularity, Scholastic published a series of children's books based on some of the era's more popular games. The series was dubbed *Worlds of Power*, and the first release was none other than *Blaster Master*. Written by A.L. Singer (a pen name for author Peter Lerangis), the book retold the game's story, although there were even more liberties taken with the plot than there were instances of superfluous onomatopoeia. There was, however, the occasional helpful game hint, such as, "You must defeat each Underboss in order to advance."

Most game companies wisely chose to ignore the events of the *Worlds of Power* books, but Sunsoft apparently took a shine to Singer's interpretation of Jason's adventure. The company would later incorporate plot points from the book into the PlayStation sequel, *Blaster Master: Blasting Again*, effectively making *Worlds of Power* series canon.



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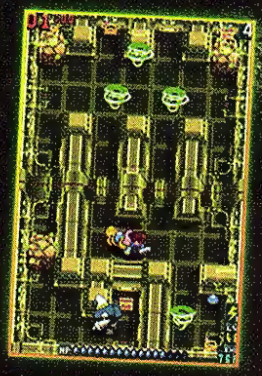

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EVERYONE 10+

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Comic Mischief
Mild Fantasy Violence
Suggestive Themes

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REVIEWS

IN-DEPTH REVIEWS OF ALL THE LATEST GAMES

We sink our teeth into Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia, the storied series' latest DS adventure.

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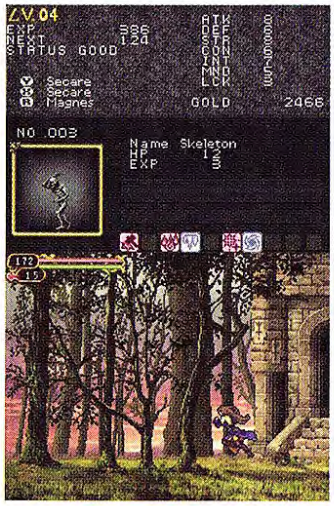

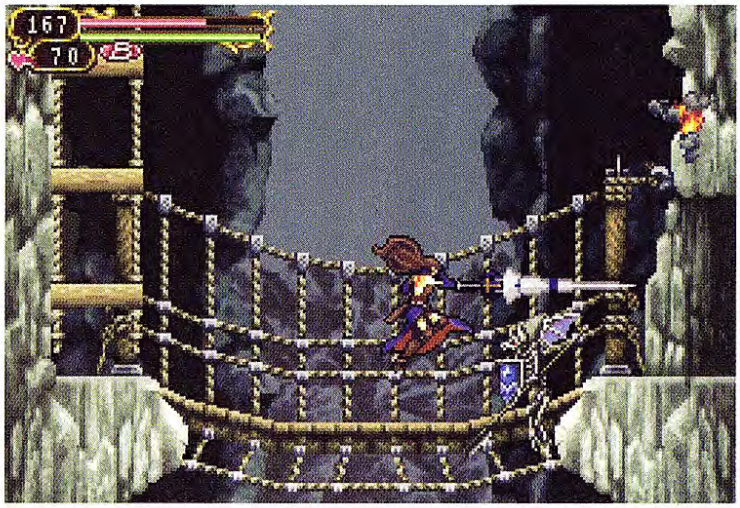

Glyphs at the Ready

CASTLEVANIA: ORDER OF ECCLESIA

RATING: **8.0**

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **KONAMI**
DEVELOPER: **KONAMI**
ESRB: **TEEN**

The Castlevania series took to modern handhelds like a merman to water, inspiring five acclaimed titles in only six years. But the consistent success of the series has presented a mounting challenge to its developers, who must tread a fine line between preserving a winning formula and coming up with enough new twists to keep the series fresh. They've fallen slightly short of that mark with Order of Ecclesia, which nails the fundamentals of the series but never finds a memorable hook.

The most interesting change is the dismantling of the typical "Metroidvania" structure. Instead of a single giant castle, Order of Ecclesia offers a world map dotted with locations—a lighthouse, a town, a mountain pass, a prison—each of which is a small self-contained level reminiscent of Castlevania games from the 8- and 16-bit eras. Some do have hidden rooms and alternate routes, but many are straightforward levels that offer little in the way of exploration. Instead the focus is squarely on action, with huge bosses and sub-bosses topping a diverse variety of lesser foes. With the new focus comes a sharply increased difficulty curve—you'll likely die more in Order of Ecclesia than in all the previous handheld Castlevania titles combined. But the game never feels cruel or unfair; there are plenty of save points, and a careful study of each boss's patterns will eventually lead you to victory. And since the game still has RPG elements such as shops and leveling up, you can always replay old areas to earn money and experience points when you get stuck.

The host of monsters and ghouls you'll face on your quest are an imaginative and well-animated lot, and most seem to be completely new. (For the last decade, the Castlevania series has been shamelessly recycling enemy sprites that were originally drawn for 16-bit games like Bloodlines and Rondo of Blood, but Order of Ecclesia looks to be composed of entirely fresh assets.) The inspired menagerie of foes and the varied settings give the game a distinctive look, with frequent splashes of color that provide a welcome departure from the usual dank castle interiors. The human characters have been redesigned to look more realistic and less anime-cute, giving the game a more adult style to reflect its more adult level of challenge. Unfortunately, the soundtrack has gone in the exact opposite direction—it's pleasant but generic, with none of the bold compositions and exotic instrument choices that made Portrait of Ruin so extraordinary.

But the bigger disappointment is how little mileage Order of Ecclesia gets out of its new glyph system. Instead of wielding weapons, heroine Shanoa uses magical glyphs that are found in statues or won randomly from fallen foes. A spell-casting heroine sounds like a major departure for the series, but the change is little more than semantics; where other Castlevania heroes would equip and swing a sword, Shanoa equips a glyph to make a self-swinging sword appear in her hands magically. Other glyphs have more-creative powers, such as summoning magical companions or transforming Shanoa into the form of an enemy, but the whole thing plays out almost exactly like the Tactical Soul system found in Aria of Sorrow and Dawn of Sorrow. After Portrait of Ruin's clever two-character system opened up so many interesting new gameplay possibilities, it's disappointing to see the glyph system merely reorganize the series' traditional arsenal of weapons and spells without adding much of significance.

Order of Ecclesia may not have a wealth of newness to contribute, but the Castlevania formula still works like a charm, and the game's traditionally strong boss and level designs hold up well in the smaller, more focused areas. Hardcore fans will delight in the deeper challenges and more adult look, but with little in the way of new play mechanics, Order of Ecclesia probably isn't going to find a spot in the Castlevania hall of fame.

—CASEY L.

WRITERS' BLOCK

WHAT VIDEO GAME CHARACTER WOULD YOU ENDORSE FOR PRESIDENT?

Justin Cheng

There's only one choice: Mike Haggar from Final Fight. He's got political experience, and he takes a very hands-on approach to cleaning up the streets.

Chris Hoffman

I'm good as long it's not Princess Peach. Her national security is terrible. It seems like every other week her kingdom gets conquered by talking turtles.

Tom Holoien

The obvious choice(s) are the Elite Beat Agents. Can anyone think of a problem their rhythmic cheering can't solve? I didn't think so.

Casey Loe

Since this era's Belmont (Julius) has gone mad, Alucard is our only hope for defeating the Dracula/Death ticket in 2008.

Chris Shepperd

I'm looking for an experienced candidate that walks softly and carries a big hammer. I'm voting for King Dedede.

George Sinfield

My vote goes to green candidates Luigi and Squirtle. And Wario for Secretary of the Treasury.

Chris Slate

Either one of the Bad Dudes. How you gonna kidnap the president now, ninjas? Huh?

Steve Thomason

Albert Wesker has the qualities we need in these troubled times. He's resourceful, persistent, and has experience as both a scientist and a businessman. And as a mutated superhuman.

SPRAY

SPRAY

SPRAY

RATING: **3.0**

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **TECMO**
DEVELOPER: **EKO SOFTWARE**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

The core concept behind SPRay—spewing various liquids to solve puzzles and overcome platforming challenges—holds a fair amount of promise, but the end product is in desperate need of a few more months in the hopper. Whatever potential the game had is squandered by lackluster controls, an uncooperative camera, sloppy collision detection, and clunky implementation of several gameplay mechanics, a number of which are inadequately explained during your travels. (That you're supposed to lock onto and *pull* giant seeds with your water stream isn't exactly intuitive.) Archaic, confusing level designs often make it unclear what you're supposed to do next, and you'll spend a lot of time wandering aimlessly through boring, nondescript environments. To make matters worse, the game requires you to retread each stage multiple times, and of the six total areas, *two* are ice worlds—'cause a desert level would have been just a little too original.

One final note: if you're going to make a game that prominently features vomiting, please make sure it's good. Otherwise you're asking for an unreasonable level of restraint from we critics. Only through sheer force of will have I avoided comparing the enjoyment derived from playing SPRay to that of regurgitating a lung. —**STEVE T.**

Dealbreaker

FACEBREAKER K.O. PARTY

RATING: **5.0**

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS**
DEVELOPER: **EA CANADA**
ESRB: **TEEN**

We all had high hopes for EA's FaceBreaker, mostly because it was developed by EA Canada, the minds behind the excellent Fight Night series, and because it looked like a modern Punch-Out. Unfortunately, it falls far short of those expectations.

FaceBreaker's problems are numerous, but the most egregious is the fact that it just doesn't play well. The game uses the Wii remote and nunchuk's motion controls for punching and buttons for other functions, and while basic punching is relatively intuitive, it's incredibly hard to pull off defensive moves effectively. The game has you tilt the remote or nunchuk back to charge a more powerful punch, dodge, or parry, and the responsiveness for this maneuver is game-breakingly bad, especially when defense is such a crucial aspect of the game. Since you have to match your defense to the type of punch thrown, by the time you select the correct one you just don't have the time to wait for the game to register your motions. The AI has no problem with defense, though, meaning you'll have trouble racking up big combos while your opponent beats you senseless.

The Wii version of the game has two exclusive multiplayer modes: one in which you're assigned random characters and random rules to fight with, and one in which you and your opponents battle with teams of three. The game is definitely more fun with human opponents. The characters, though, while trying to be fun and cartoony, mostly fall flat, and with the exception of speed there isn't much difference in their fighting styles. All in all, FaceBreaker K.O. Party, though occasionally entertaining, is a huge disappointment. You can find much better fighting games for Wii. —**TOM H.**

TNA IMPACT! Wii

FIFA SOCCER 09 ALL-PLAY Wii

SHAUN THE SHEEP DS

LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD'S ZOMBIE BBQ DS

BOOGIE SUPERSTAR Wii

FIFA SOCCER 09 ALL-PLAY Wii

TNA IMPACT!

RATING: **5.0**

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **MIDWAY**
DEVELOPER: **POINT OF VIEW**
ESRB: **TEEN**

It's unfortunate that Midway's first foray into the squared circle isn't what you could call a success. The game had a lot of potential to be a strong alternative to the usual WWE product—much like TNA itself—with a wide array of pro wrestlers you don't see on WWE television. But once I started playing, I was in for one disappointment after another: there's no widescreen support, so everything's stretched; there are no real wrestling rules when playing the game, other than the requirement to pin your opponent in the ring (there are no rope breaks and no disqualifications for any of the matches); and worst of all, there is no create-a-wrestler mode, a feature that's been a staple of wrestling games for a decade. On the plus side, it's easy to pick up the Wii remote and nunchuk and start beating on your opponent, though there are some annoying collision-detection issues. Also frustrating is the fact that there's only one context-sensitive button to pick up and drop objects, climb a turnbuckle, get in and out of the ring, and pin—which means that if you're going for a pin and you're too close to the ropes, more often than not you'll roll out of the ring instead of go for the cover. —**JUSTIN C.**

BOOGIE SUPERSTAR

RATING: **7.0**

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **EA**
DEVELOPER: **EA MONTREAL**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

I'm torn on Boogie SuperStar. The 12-year-old in me that wants to dance and sing gives this game a 9, with one point docked for twitchy controls that don't always detect the dance move you're doing. But the grown-up game critic in me gives it a 6 because although it's fun, the game has limited appeal; the avatars are too skinny and the visuals positively drip glitter and girly stuff. To be fair, there's no rule against boys picking up a Wii remote or USB microphone to get their game on. But if there ever was a girl-centric game, this is it—for better or for worse. —**AMANDA G.**

FIFA SOCCER 09 ALL-PLAY

RATING: **7.5**

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS**
DEVELOPER: **EA CANADA**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

Though the overall product doesn't quite measure up to this year's Madden or Tiger, FIFA 09 may be EA's best effort at catering to both casual and hardcore fans of a particular sport. You don't have to know the starting lineup for Boca Juniors to enjoy the game, nor does it neglect those who value such knowledge. An 8-on-8 Footii mode offers a lighthearted, Mii-oriented take on "the beautiful game," while an incredibly deep career mode lets you manage everything from your team's scouting budget to sponsorship deals. Likewise, the controls come in a variety of configurations, including the option to use a GameCube or Classic controller. Eschewing the Wii remote negates one of this year's best new features, however; pointer-based passing. Once you give that a try, you'll never want to go back. —**STEVE T.**

SHAUN THE SHEEP

RATING: **4.0**

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **D3 PUBLISHER**
DEVELOPER: **ART CO. LTD.**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

Animator Aardman's usual wit never shines through in the DS adaptation of Disney Channel cartoon Shaun the Sheep. It gets lost in the tangled mess of fenced-off areas that you must to navigate to locate Shaun's sheep friends. A map of the farm on the top screen shows you where you are, but area exits don't always concur with the directions on the map, making it a guessing game as to where you will end up next. The navigation issues are particularly annoying when you must cross the farm repeatedly to find and deliver items to uncover the sheep. At some destinations, you engage in touch-triggered activities that are based on episodes from the show (rescuing Timmy from the circus high-wire, for example). But the tie-ins and unlockable minigames are not enough to make the game any more entertaining than counting sheep. —**GEORGE S.**

LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD'S ZOMBIE BBQ

RATING: **5.0**

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **DESTINEER**
DEVELOPER: **ENJOY UP!**
ESRB: **TEEN**

If you were to filter House of the Dead through Mother Goose, you'd end up with rail-shooter Little Red Riding Hood's Zombie BBQ. It's more funny *weird* than funny *humorous*, but at least it's got an interestingly skewed point of view. The playing field extends over both screens, with your character at the bottom of the touch screen. You tap it to aim your shots, and press the directional controls or slide the stylus along the screen to move your character (either an all-grown-up version of Little Red Riding Hood or Japanese folklore hero Momotaro) horizontally. It's a bit clunky, especially when enemies appear at the bottom of the screen and you inadvertently slide into them instead of shooting them. Weapon-reloading is more nuisance than fun, and some weapons, such as the shotgun, have such short range that they're of little use. The art is storybook grotesque—Gretel is depicted as a blue-skinned, snot-spewing gnome and Pinocchio as a knob-kneed giant with a detachable head. Call it a fractured fairy tale with guns and flamethrowers. —**GEORGE S.**

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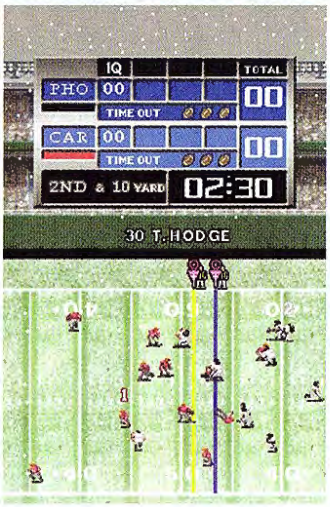
WE CHEER Wii

LEGO BATMAN: THE VIDEOGAME DS



WE CHEER Wii

ROCK REVOLUTION Wii

WE CHEER

RATING: **6.0**

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **NAMCO BANDAI**
DEVELOPER: **NAMCO BANDAI**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

I'm comfortable enough in my own skin to admit that I enjoyed We Cheer. This intriguing new take on the rhythm genre has you string together various arm movements and thereby coaxes you into performing some pretty elaborate choreography. I would have enjoyed the game even more, however, were it not so brutally difficult. Granted, I'm not the most coordinated person on the planet, but the requirements for successfully completing a song seem unreasonably high. Inconsistent controls only make matters worse, and it's very difficult at times to discern what you're doing wrong. I've got spirit, but it's not as fervent as it could be. **–STEVE T.**

LEGO BATMAN: THE VIDEOGAME

RATING: **7.5**

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE**
DEVELOPERS: **TRAVELLER'S TALES**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

LEGO Batman is lots of fun, especially if you haven't played a LEGO title before. It looks nice, controls well, and boasts a ton of extras to unlock and collect–giving it serious replay value. Also, the ability to play as villains is something may gamers have wanted to do for years, and Danny Elfman's 1989 *Batman* film score really sets the mood (even if you do hear the same few stanzas a little too often).

Unfortunately, like the music, the gameplay soon becomes repetitive: boss fights all have the same basic structure, and too much of your time is spent switching costumes for a few seconds just to complete a requirement for opening a door. Even the Joker shouldn't make his hideouts this needlessly complicated. **–ALAN A.**

ROCK REVOLUTION

RATING: **4.5**

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **KONAMI**
DEVELOPER: **HB STUDIOS**
ESRB: **TEEN**

Rock Revolution is one Rock Band copycat you can afford to skip. We respect the game for going without plastic guitars, but the Wii-remote-and-nunchuk control scheme it uses instead feels awkward and unrealistic. Swinging the controllers up and down works for drums, but all the button-pressing and circular wrist motions required to hit the hard notes on bass and guitar gets downright complicated. And the career mode–which you need to play to unlock songs–is pretty harsh on anything but Beginner difficulty, forcing you to memorize songs for "recording sessions" that hide the note tracker. You might be able to get over that enough to enjoy the multiplayer, and maybe you'll like some of the songs. But overall the game comes off as unpolished, unrefined, and unfun. **–AMANDA G.**

Pigskin Revival

TECMO BOWL: KICKOFF

RATING: **6.0**

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **TECMO**
DEVELOPER: **POLYGON MAGIC**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

Virtually every gamer over a certain age has fond memories of Bo Jackson and Christian Okoye dominating at Tecmo Bowl. The classic football title was fast-paced and full of big plays that pushed the game out of the sporting arena and toward the action genre. Although the concept held up through Tecmo Super Bowl on the Super NES in 1993, 15 years later it just feels archaic. Tecmo Bowl: Kickoff uses the same top-down view, limited play selection, and big-play exploitation as the franchise did in its heyday, but gamers expect more now. Virtually random events such as fumbles and blocked passes are far too frequent, making you feel like you have no control over your chances of success. You can assign special abilities to your players, but they are context-specific and infrequent, adding even more randomness. And in an era in which gamers are used to monster playbooks, having only four running plays and four passing plays to choose from feels like having your hands tied. Still, there's plenty of nostalgia in the presentation of Kickoff: quirky in-play animations and halftime shows feel like they were ripped straight from the original game. And multiplayer modes that include Wi-Fi gameplay let you stage rematches with your old neighborhood pal who kicked your butt at Tecmo Bowl on a daily basis when you were kids. While it's not Tecmo's fault, gamers won't be happy with the inability to play with real NFL players (that's a rant for another day), but everything else you liked in the old Tecmo Bowl titles are here. Just don't expect much more than that. **–CHRIS SH.**

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ULTIMATE BAND Wii

LEGO BATMAN: THE VIDEOGAME Wii

ROBOCALYPSE DS

Double Your Fun

BROTHERS IN ARMS: DOUBLE TIME

RATING: **7.0**

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT**
DEVELOPER: **GEARBOX SOFTWARE**
ESRB: **MATURE**

Originally announced last year, Ubisoft's World War II first-person shooter Brothers in Arms: Double Time is finally available on Wii. Was it worth the wait? Well, Double Time is a good value for your money since it includes both Brothers in Arms: Road to Hill 30 and Brothers in Arms: Earned in Blood, two critically acclaimed games (when they were originally released) that take a more strategic tack than other WWII shooters. Instead of putting you in the combat boots of a one-man army as in Call of Duty or Medal of Honor, this title gives you a squad to command. Using the Wii remote, you can direct your troops (or, in some missions, a tank) to suppress the enemy with gunfire while you sneak around your distracted foes and take them out. It's a bit like a real-time strategy game mixed with a first-person shooter, and it's great when it works. Sadly, the AI for both allies and enemies isn't as good as it should be—sometimes your soldiers just stand there even when you tell them to move and take cover, and other times your buddies will run to a waypoint but take a different path than the safe one you just took, instead passing right through the enemy's line of fire and getting killed. It's also unfortunate that there's no multiplayer of any sort, which definitely hurts the game's longevity. **—JUSTIN C.**

ULTIMATE BAND

RATING: **6.0**

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **DISNEY INTERACTIVE**
DEVELOPER: **FALL LINE STUDIO**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

Ultimate Band attempts to provide a similar experience to Guitar Hero or Rock Band, only without the need for expensive peripherals. It's a valiant effort, but you're inevitably left feeling less like a rock star and more like a novelty act. While guitar and bass work reasonably well—hold the nunchuk in one hand and strum with the Wii remote—gesture-based singing feels completely ridiculous, and the drums simply aren't very satisfying. The track list does offer a pretty broad selection of about 30 tunes, and the fact that you can play each with either male or female vocals is a nice touch. I just wish the game didn't force you to replay songs so much (albeit with different instruments) to progress through the main story mode. **—STEVE T.**

LEGO BATMAN: THE VIDEOGAME

RATING: **7.0**

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE**
DEVELOPER: **TRAVELLER'S TALES**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

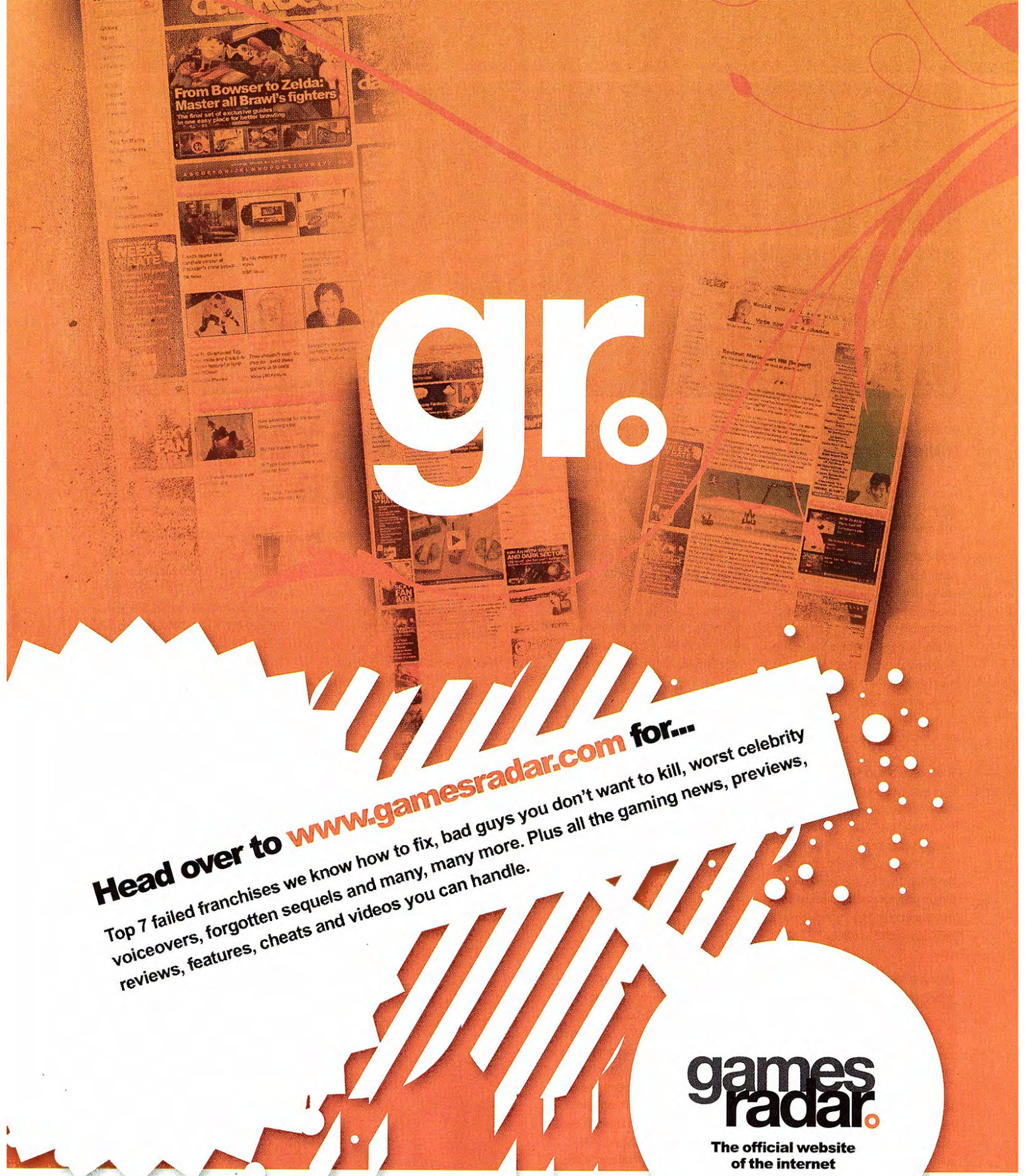
After the releases of LEGO Star Wars and LEGO Indiana Jones, you should know what to expect from LEGO Batman: The Videogame—it's like those games, only with Batman. LEGO Batman is ideal entertainment for Caped Crusader fans of all ages: you can't die, and it's fun to run around and destroy, build, and collect things. (After playing so many games that are essentially the same, however, I must admit that I'm starting to get tired of the formula.) A signature element of the LEGO games is their undeniable charm, and the diminutive, blocky Batman et al certainly have that. However, it's a shame that since LEGO Batman isn't based on any of the films, the game doesn't have humorous LEGO-ized re-creations of memorable movie moments. **—JUSTIN C.**

ROBOCALYPSE

RATING: **7.5**

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **TECMO**
DEVELOPER: **VOGSTER**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

Robocalypse is a real-time strategy game with a hilarious plotline involving aliens, sentient toasters, beautiful women, chess nerds, and an FBI agent named Roger Smashteeth. If you've ever dabbled in RTS games before, you're not going to find any new gameplay elements here; harvest scrap metal to build things, make robots, upgrade structures, attack, repeat. It's a winning formula, so familiarity isn't necessarily a bad thing, but even a little gameplay innovation would have been welcome. The main story is also very short, although local multiplayer lets you battle CPUs or human friends on extra maps. RTS fans should give it a look, as should anyone who's been itching for some good, funny writing to liven up their DS. **—ALAN A.**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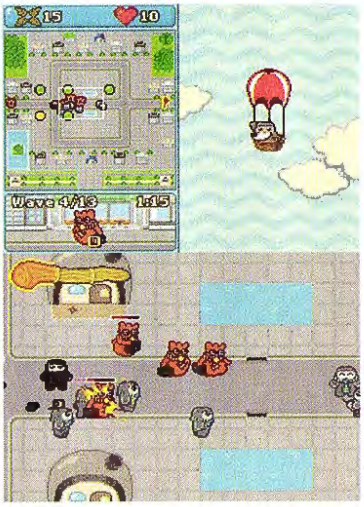
DOKAPON KINGDOM

MYSIMS KINGDOM

DRAGON BALL: ORIGINS



DOKAPON KINGDOM

RATING: **8.5**

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **ATLUS**
DEVELOPER: **STING**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

Don't be fooled by Dokapon Kingdom's childish design: this unique board game-RPG crossover makes it hard not to enjoy yourself. Dokapon is primarily a game of economic domination (though there are alternate game modes). You move around the board-game map based on random spins, then fight monsters, complete quests, or liberate towns to raise your character's net worth and foil your opponents. With numerous game modes (including a story mode) that can be played alone or with friends and the ability to save and load your game at any time, it's a fantastic party game and it breathes much-needed life into the dying board-game genre. Please, judge Dokapon Kingdom based on its gameplay and not its looks. You'll be glad you did. **–TOM H.**

MYSIMS KINGDOM

RATING: **7.5**

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS**
DEVELOPER: **EA REDWOOD SHORES**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

MySims Kingdom marries all the cutesy fun and house-building stuff I loved from MySims to an RPG storyline. You are the King's Wandolier, sent out to build stuff in his kingdom and make the subjects happy. There are tons of places to visit, each with different themes (space, cowboys, etc.) and different Sims that need your help—some you might recognize from the first MySims. You level up by collecting items to complete scrolls, which grant you more building tools and customization options. Even if you're not into the Sims, the item-collecting is pretty addictive (ditto for fishing). The only big gripe I have is the clunky camera—it's tough to position while in building mode. Other than that, this is a must-own for Wii devotees and Sims fans alike. **–AMANDA G.**

DRAGON BALL: ORIGINS

RATING: **7.0**

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **ATARI**
DEVELOPER: **GAME REPUBLIC**
RATING: **EVERYONE**

Dragon Ball: Origins is a pretty good action-adventure game, and it's an even better re-creation of Akira Toriyama's classic comics. A lot of Japanese game makers probably grew up on this stuff, and the 3-D characters here certainly show a fan's attention to detail.

Cute cartoon graphics are only part of it, though. You can play the game with the face buttons, but Origins works as well or better using nothing but the stylus. Some of the slower, more puzzle-focused areas can be difficult to navigate (too many twisty passages that all look alike), but combat is straightforward. Even combos and other tricky moves unreel with simple motions on the touch screen, and a big arsenal of different skills to develop keeps the game fresh through 50-some episodes. **–DAVID S.**

Pirates: You're on Notice

NINJATOWN

SCORE: **8.0**

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **SOUTHPEAK INTERACTIVE**
DEVELOPER: **VENAN ENTERTAINMENT**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

Ninjatown is one of those titles that risks falling into the cracks between various groups of gamers—it could be too complicated for the younger set and too cutesy for older gamers. Fortunately, smart design decisions let Ninjatown sidestep this concern better than most games of its ilk.

The gameplay in this real-time strategy title is straightforward: you must prevent waves of enemies from crossing from one side of the map to the other. Troop movement is limited to narrow paths, there aren't too many kinds of units to keep straight, and there's a lot of overlap in what troops can and can't do, making slightly inaccurate decisions more forgivable. But the need for smart strategy isn't thrown out the window; in fact, some levels are downright nasty. Fortunately for gamers new to the RTS genre, Ninjatown keeps track of how many times you've failed, and asks if you want to play on an easier setting after several unsuccessful missions.

Another aspect that will benefit gamers of all skill levels is the pause menu's info section, which is filled with descriptions of every building, enemy, and special power in easy-to-digest terms.

Despite being easily accessible, the game is not just for beginners, and gamers looking for a more serious graphical approach shouldn't be deterred by the almost sickeningly adorable little ninjas—Ninjatown features plenty of humor aimed at a slightly older crowd than the animation style suggests.

The multiplayer modes aren't as robust as they could've been—there are a scant few maps, no level creator, and no Wi-Fi modes—but the fun action and single-card play makes it worth trying out. **–CHRIS SH.**

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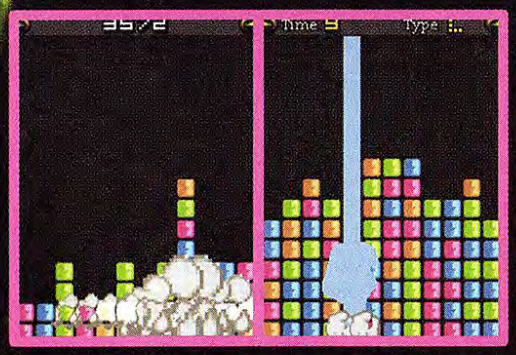

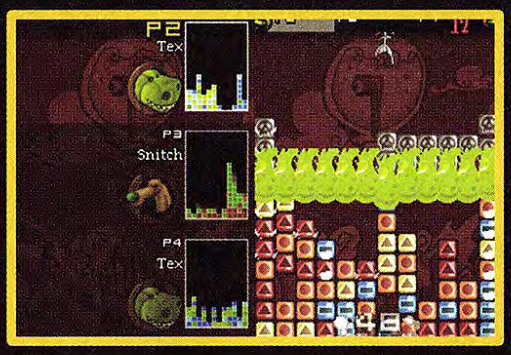

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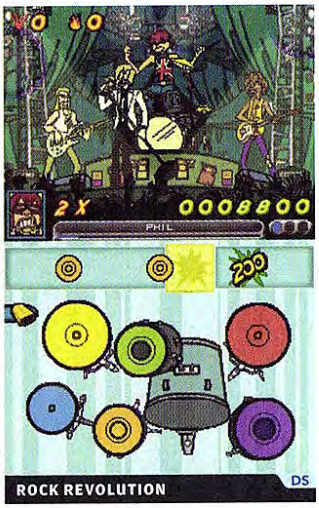
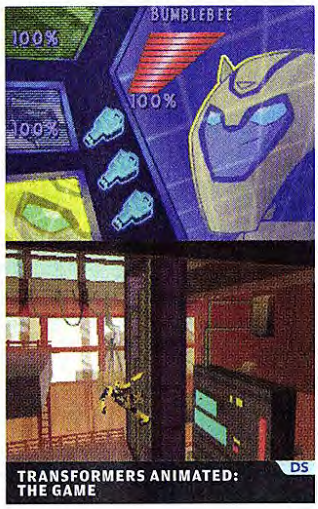

ROCK REVOLUTION DS

AWAY: SHUFFLE DUNGEON DS

LOST IN BLUE: SHIPWRECKED Wii

NARUTO: CLASH OF NINJA REVOLUTION 2 Wii


TRANSFORMERS ANIMATED: THE GAME DS

ROCK REVOLUTION

RATING: **5.0**

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **KONAMI**
DEVELOPER: **HB STUDIOS**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

The DS version of Rock Revolution packs a lot in a tiny package. You can play bass, guitar, or drums, or sing into the DS microphone on 20 different songs. It's not much fun to play the same instrument over and over without a break, though, and it's impossible to switch roles without restarting the career mode. A vocals career is especially rough—spending that much time so close to the DS screen isn't easy on the eyes. It's a long trudge to unlock all the songs, but the game is much more rewarding once the career mode is over. Co-op multiplayer is especially addictive, so check it out if you have some friends to jam with. **—DAVID S.**

AWAY: SHUFFLE DUNGEON

RATING: **7.0**

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **MAJESCO**
DEVELOPER: **ARTOON/MISTWALKER**
RATING: **EVERYONE 10+**

RPGs, even action-RPGs, can often be slow-paced, thoughtful games. AWAY: Shuffle Dungeon is anything but slow. It's a top-down adventure in the old-fashioned Zelda style, but mixed with some puzzle elements that speed it up to a dizzying pace. While it may have its faults, the game will definitely force you to think on your feet.

Each floor of a dungeon has two halves, one on each DS screen. One floor is always on the verge of disappearing, though—a new half "shuffles" in every few seconds. If you're caught on the half that disappears, enjoy your trip back to the top of the dungeon. It takes some fancy footwork to keep plugging all the way to the bottom.

AWAY isn't so much about hacking through monsters as simply figuring out how to escape with your skin intact. Some parts of a level are accessible only when two halves happen to line up just right—it's a race against time to scoot through and escape. Unfortunately, that can also lead to stretches of dead time, waiting for the right pair of "cards."

Clearing each dungeon rebuilds a piece of the town at the top of the caverns, such as an armory or item shop. Setting up the town for optimal feng shui is a fun little extra, but on the whole, AWAY doesn't have the depth of the genre's classics. It does have an original design, though, and a lot of visual charm. RPG veterans who want a real challenge for their reflexes should check it out. **—DAVID S.**

LOST IN BLUE: SHIPWRECKED

RATING: **6.5**

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **KONAMI**
DEVELOPER: **KONAMI**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

Previous Lost in Blue games on the DS have intrigued us with their unique premise (survive on a deserted island while you try to find a way to escape) but suffered from too much survival and not enough exploration. Unfortunately Shipwrecked, the series' Wii debut, is only a slight improvement. All too often I wanted to explore a new area I had just unlocked or try out a new tool I had made, but I had to put my plans on hold because my characters were sick, hungry, or thirsty—sometimes even right after I had just fed them a huge meal. It's a shame, because if it weren't for that one infuriating aspect of the game, Shipwrecked would be a real winner. **—TOM H.**

NARUTO: CLASH OF NINJA REVOLUTION 2

RATING: **8.0**

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **TOMY**
DEVELOPER: **EIGHTING**
ESRB: **TEEN**

While the latest Naruto fighting game on Wii isn't quite a revolution, it does offer an array of new features. In addition to more characters and a brand-new story, the gameplay now includes hand seals (gesture with the Wii remote to, say, enhance your attacks), paper bombs (point at the screen with the Wii remote to throw highly explosive pieces of paper at your opponent, or throw them around to booby-trap the environment), and tag-team battles (à la Marvel vs. Capcom). Thankfully, all of the control schemes from the first game return, too, though certain maneuvers are impossible without the remote. With so many additions, Clash of Ninja Revolution 2 is the best Naruto fighting game so far, but here's hoping the next iteration includes online multiplayer. **—JUSTIN C.**

TRANSFORMERS ANIMATED: THE GAME

RATING: **7.0**

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **ACTIVISION**
DEVELOPER: **ARTIFICIAL MIND & MOVEMENT**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

It would be easy to spin a simple action game out of the new Transformers cartoon. Activision's take is a little smarter than that. It's as much about solving puzzles as smashing stuff with big robots, although there's enough smashing to go around. The good guys are a three-man team of Autobots. Bumblebee can jump, scale walls, and charge power stations. Bulkhead picks up items and smashes doors with his heavy fists. Optimus Prime has a balance of speed and strength, plus some special skills—his grapple beam pulls him up to hidden areas, while his energy axe hits far-off switches. Minigame levels starring other Autobots add more action to the mix. For the most part, though, this is a surprisingly thoughtful challenge, and a much more effective game for it. **—DAVID S.**

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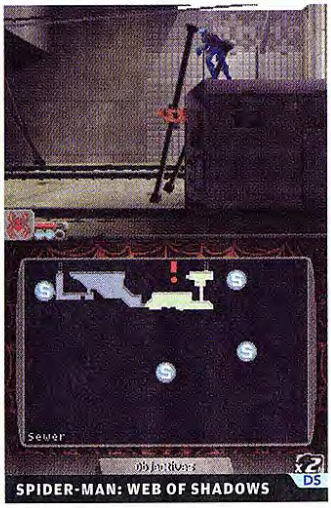
CELEBRITY SPORTS SHOWDOWN Wii

THE KING OF FIGHTERS: THE OROCHI SAGA Wii

SPECTROBES: BEYOND THE PORTALS DS

MASTER OF THE MONSTER LAIR DS


SPIDER-MAN: WEB OF SHADOWS DS

CELEBRITY SPORTS SHOWDOWN

RATING: **4.5**

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **EA SPORTS**
DEVELOPER: **EA CANADA**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

Ten celebrities—from musicians such as Nelly Furtado to former Olympians such as Kristi Yamaguchi—as well as 15 other eclectic characters (a woman in a bunny suit, Elise from the SSX games) compete in 12 events ranging from badminton to slalom skiing to jet racing. Yes, Celebrity Sports Showdown is a very surreal game. Still, the celebrities are ultimately window dressing—once you're over the gimmick, you're left with yet another collection of motion-controlled sports minigames. Some of the events are decently fun (dodgeball, for example), especially when you're playing against your friends since the AI isn't that great. However, most of them need work—partially because they're not great fun to begin with, and partially because the controls aren't as solid as they should be. **—JUSTIN C.**

THE KING OF FIGHTERS: THE OROCHI SAGA

RATING: **8.0**

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **SNK PLAYMORE**
DEVELOPER: **SNK/TERMINAL REALITY**
ESRB: **TEEN**

If you're old enough to remember plunking quarters into the early King of Fighters NeoGeo games, then this compilation is for you. The sheer volume of strategic, 2-D, three-on-three combat contained in The Orochi Saga is nearly unmatched—we're talking five full arcade-perfect ports (KOF '94, '95, '96, '97, and '98), each with oodles of characters, moves, and special techniques, supplemented with numerous optional challenges and plentiful unlockables. The games definitely show their age (particularly KOF '94 and '95), but they're still fun, especially since each one has its own subtle nuances to master. There are also numerous control options to suit your playing style, including compatibility with the GameCube and Classic controllers. It's a great collection for those who still enjoy a good classic 2-D fighting game. **—CHRIS H.**

SPECTROBES: BEYOND THE PORTALS

RATING: **8.0**

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **DISNEY INTERACTIVE**
DEVELOPER: **JUPITER CORP.**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

Disney Interactive's answer to Pokémon has a new perspective. Instead of displaying its alien-world excavation from an overhead view spread over both screens, as in the previous Spectrobes title, Spectrobes: Beyond the Portals brings the camera down to the adventurer's level and offers a much improved 3-D view on the touch screen. That frees up the top screen for maps and character info. The sequel's presentation, from in-game graphics and sound to between-mission movies and improved interfaces, is top-notch, and the adventure is long, if not a little tedious. If you're a thorough player, you'll like scouring the field for fossils and digging them up with the care of an archeologist. You'll also spend hours evolving and matching Spectrobes to cultivate a competitive edge. If you're more action-oriented, the intricacies will wear on you but you'll enjoy direct control over your Spectrobes in the game's many battles. **—GEORGE S.**

MASTER OF THE MONSTER LAIR

RATING: **6.5**

PLATFORM: **DS**
PUBLISHER: **ATLUS**
DEVELOPER: **GLOBAL A ENTERTAINMENT**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

Why tire yourself out hunting monsters when you can build a dungeon and lure them straight to you? That's the premise behind Master of the Monster Lair, an RPG where a 12-year-old hero, a talking shovel, and a pet Mimic Slime work together to dig out a dungeon and fill it with amenities for wild monsters. Once they take the bait, you can kill them in turn-based, Dragon Quest-style battles to earn rare items, solve minor quests, and lure out the boss of the floor.

Master of the Monster Lair has a fun and unique concept, intuitive controls, and an enjoyably humorous story. Tinkering with your dungeon can be oddly addictive, but the constant battles grow tiresome quickly, as does the slow pace at which your dungeon expands and your hero gains in strength. It'll take a lot of patience to master this monster lair. **—CASEY L.**

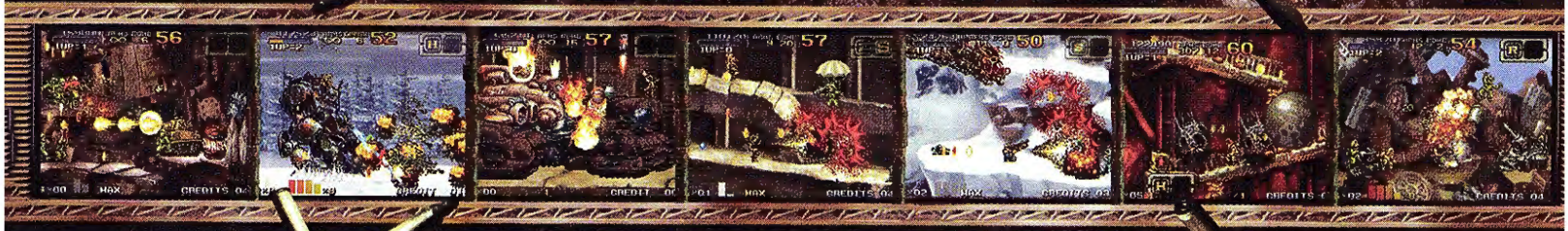
ALSO THIS MONTH

Wii Music (previewed this issue) will be out on October 20.... Activision wouldn't send us many of their fall titles, including **Spider-Man: Web of Shadows** (Wii, DS), **Guitar Hero: World Tour** (Wii), **Quantum of Solace** (Wii, DS), and **Crash: Mind over Mutant** (Wii, DS), for a timely review, so be wary.... Aksys Games' **Princess on Ice** (DS) provides Elite Beat Agents-style ice skating for girls, while **Theresia** (DS) is a lengthy point-and-click horror adventure.... Wanna learn facts in multiple categories? Play EA's **Brain Quest** (DS)... Wanna learn to cook? Try Atari's **What's Cooking? Jamie Oliver** (DS).... **Sam & Max Season 1** (Wii) scored a respectable 7.0 a few issues back. It should finally be out by the time you read this.

NOVEMBER 18, 2008

SNK PLAYMORE PRESENTS

METAL SLUG 7™



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[REVIEWS ARCHIVE]

The Higher End of the Spectrum

Last month's issue was filled with gaming greatness. Both Samba de Amigo on Wii and Kirby Super Star Ultra on DS received 9.0s, and seven games got either 8.0 or 8.5. Of course, there were some lower-scoring games, too, but the majority (64%) of titles reviewed last month got at least a 7.0. We certainly hope the rest of the year turns out as well.

SCORES REFLECT INDIVIDUAL REVIEWERS' OPINIONS.
• INDICATES WI-FI COMPATIBLE

TITLE	SCORE	PUBLISHER	VOL.	ESRB
Wii				
Alone in the Dark	4.0	Atari	232	M
Alvin and the Chipmunks	N/A	Brash	224	E
Backyard Baseball '09	N/A	Atari	231	E
Baroque	3.0	Atlus	227	T
Battle of the Bands	7.0	THQ	228	T
Blast Works: Build, Trade, Destroy	8.5	Majesco	229	E
Bomberman Land	5.0	Hudson	226	E
Boom Blox	8.0	Electronic Arts	229	E
Bully: Scholarship Edition	8.5	Rockstar	227	T
Castle of Shikigami III	7.0	Aksys	228	T
The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian	N/A	Disney Interactive	229	T
Cranium Kabookii	N/A	Ubisoft	224	E
Cruis'n	N/A	Midway	224	E
CSI: Hard Evidence	N/A	Ubisoft	225	M
Dance Dance Revolution Hottest Party 2	8.0	Konami	234	E10+
de Blob	8.0	THQ	234	E
Death Jr.: Root of Evil	7.0	Eidos	230	T
Deca Sports	N/A	Hudson	229	E
Destroy All Humans! Big Willy Unleashed	7.0	THQ	227	T
Dragon Quest Swords: The Masked Queen and the Tower of Mirrors	7.0	Square Enix	226	T
Dream Pinball 3D	N/A	Southpeak	228	E10+
Emergency Heroes	N/A	Ubisoft	230	E10+
Emergency Mayhem	N/A	Codemasters	228	T
• Endless Ocean	7.5	Nintendo	225	E
Ferrari Challenge Trofeo Pirelli	7.5	System 3	233	E
Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo's Dungeon	7.5	Square Enix	231	E10+
Furu Furu Park	N/A	Majesco	225	T
Game Party	N/A	Midway	224	E
The Golden Compass	4.0	Sega	224	E10+
• Guitar Hero: Aerosmith	7.0	RedOctane	232	T
Harvest Moon: Tree of Tranquility	6.5	Natsume	233	E
Harvey Birdman: Attorney at Law	6.5	Capcom	224	T
The House of the Dead 2 & 3 Return	7.0	Sega	227	M
The Incredible Hulk	3.5	Sega	231	T
Iron Man	5.5	Sega	229	T
Jumper	N/A	Brash	226	T
Karaoke Revolution Presents American Idol Encore	N/A	Konami	226	E
Kidz Sports: Basketball	N/A	Destineer	224	E
Kidz Sports: Ice Hockey	N/A	Destineer	225	E
Kung Fu Panda	N/A	Activision	230	E10+
LEGO Batman: The Videogame	N/A	Warner Bros.	234	E10+
LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	7.5	LucasArts	230	E10+
Line Rider 2: Unbound	5.0	Inxile	234	E
Little League World Series Baseball 2008	N/A	Activision	232	E
Lost in Blue: Shipwrecked	N/A	Konami	234	E10+
• Madden NFL 09 All-Play	9.0	Electronic Arts	232	E
• Mario Kart Wii	9.0	Nintendo	228	E
Mario Super Sluggers	7.5	Nintendo	233	E
MiniCopter: Adventure Flight	6.5	Aksys	228	E
MLB 2K8	6.5	2K Sports	227	E
MLB Power Pros 2008	7.0	2K Sports	232	E
• MX vs. ATV Untamed	6.0	THQ	224	E
My Horse and Me	N/A	Atari	225	E
• NBA Live 09 All-Play	4.0	Electronic Arts	234	E
NCAA Football 09 All-Play	5.0	Electronic Arts	232	E
NHL 2K9	7.0	2K Sports	234	E10+
• NiGHTS: Journey of Dreams	9.0	Sega	224	E
Ninja Reflex	N/A	Electronic Arts	227	E10+
• Nitro Bike	3.5	Ubisoft	225	E10+
No More Heroes	8.0	Ubisoft	226	M
Obscure: The Aftermath	7.0	Ignition	227	M
Octomania	N/A	Conspiracy	227	E
Okami	7.5	Capcom	228	T
One Piece: Unlimited Adventure	6.5	Namco Bandai	225	T
Opoona	7.0	Koei	227	E10+
Order Up!	7.0	Zoo Games	232	E
Pinball Hall of Fame: The Williams Collection	7.5	Crave	227	E10+
• Pro Evolution Soccer 2008	N/A	Konami	227	E
Puzzle Quest: Challenge of the Warlords	N/A	D3PA	224	E10+
Rock Band	8.0	MTV Games	231	T
Rock Band Track Pack Volume 1	6.5	MTV Games	232	T
Sam & Max Season One	7.0	The Adventure Company	233	T
• Samba de Amigo	9.0	Sega	234	E
Samurai Warriors: Katana	7.5	Koei	224	T
Sega Bass Fishing	5.0	Sega	227	E
Sega Superstars Tennis	8.0	Sega	227	E10+
Showtime Championship Boxing	N/A	Jack of All Games	224	E10+
SimCity Creator	6.0	Electronic Arts	234	E
SNK Arcade Classics Vol. 1	8.5	SNK Playmore	233	T
• Sonic Riders: Zero Gravity	7.0	Sega	225	E
Space Chimps	N/A	Brash	231	E10+
Speed Racer	N/A	Warner Bros. Interactive	229	E
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	7.5	LucasArts	233	T
Summer Sports: Paradise Island	3.5	Destineer	228	E
• Super Smash Bros. Brawl	10	Nintendo	226	T
Super Swing Golf Season 2	6.5	Tecmo	224	E10+
Target: Terror	N/A	Konami	227	M
• Tiger Woods PGA Tour All-Play	8.5	Electronic Arts	233	E
Top Spin 3	7.0	2K Sports	229	E
WALL*E	N/A	THQ	231	E
Wario Land: Shake It!	8.0	Nintendo	234	E
We Cheer	N/A	Namco Bandai	233	E
• We Love Golf!	8.5	Capcom	231	E10+
We Ski	6.0	Namco Bandai	229	E
Wild Earth: African Safari	N/A	Majesco	228	E
Worms: A Space Oddity	6.0	THQ	227	E10+
WWII Aces	3.0	Destineer	226	T
NINTENDO DS				
• Advance Wars: Days of Ruin	8.5	Nintendo	225	E10+
American Girl: Julie Finds a Way	N/A	THQ	224	E
Apollo Justice: Ace Attorney	8.0	Capcom	226	T

REVIEWER NOTES

DRAGON QUEST IV: CHAPTERS OF THE CHOSEN

Last month in this space I mentioned that I was enjoying the beginning of Dragon Quest IV more than I had enjoyed playing Final Fantasy IV. After an extra 20 or so hours of DQIV, I'm loving it even more. The colorful graphics really pop, the storylines are fun, and the mix of top-end 3-D graphics (for the DS) with retro sprite-based characters warms the heart of this lapsed 16-bit RPG fan. **–CHRIS SL.**

SAMBA DE AMIGO

I never played much Samba de Amigo on the Dreamcast, but the Wii version has me hooked. The controls are solid and the soundtrack is perfectly suited to the gameplay.

–CHRIS H.

COMMANDO: STEEL DISASTER

Cut from the same battle-shredded cloth as Metal Slug and Contra, Commando: Steel Disaster is pure bliss for fans of 2-D run-and-gun action. Not only does it look and control great, but it's packed with weapons and vehicles, and the intense action never lets up. The game isn't for the easily frustrated, however; even on the standard difficulty setting it's very challenging. **–CHRIS H.**

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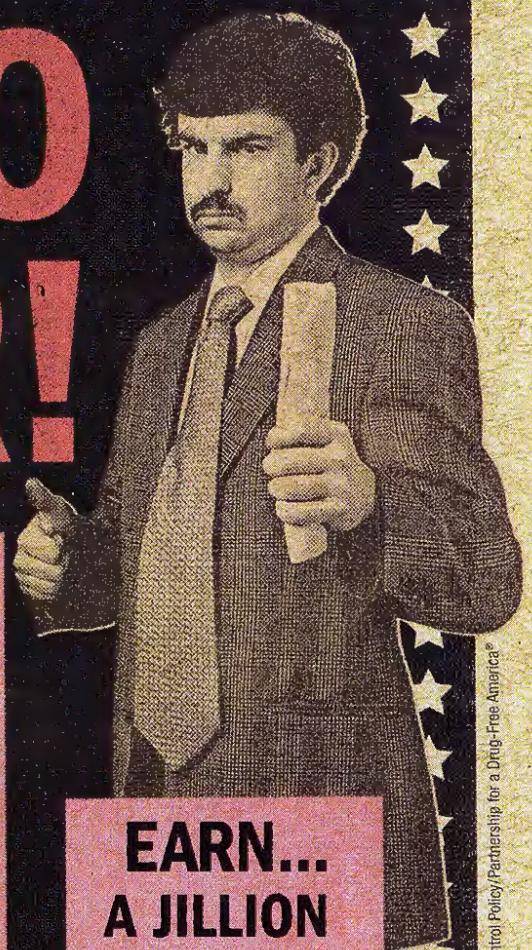

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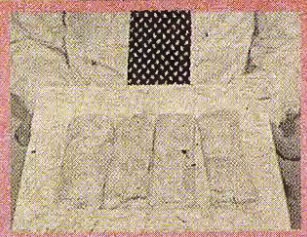

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Arkanoid DS	6.5	Square Enix	230	E
Assassin's Creed: Altair's Chronicles	7.5	Ubisoft	226	T
Bangai-O Spirits	8.0	D3PA	232	E10+
Bleach: Dark Souls	8.5	Sega	234	T
• Bomberman Land Touch! 2	6.0	Hudson	225	E
Boogie	7.0	Electronic Arts	224	E10+
Brain Challenge	N/A	Ubisoft	225	E
Brain Voyage	N/A	Eidos	228	E
Bratz: Super Babyz	N/A	THQ	226	E
Cake Mania 2	6.5	Majesco	230	E
Carnival Games	4.5	2K Games	231	E
The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian	N/A	Disney Interactive	229	E10+
Civilization Revolution	7.5	2K Games	231	E10+
Code Lyoko: Fall of Xana	N/A	The Game Factory	230	E
Commando: Steel Disaster	N/A	XS Games	229	E10+
Crosswords DS	N/A	Nintendo	228	E
Disgaea DS	7.5	NIS America	233	T
Draglade	7.5	Atlus	224	E10+
Dragon Quest IV: Chapters of the Chosen	7.5	Square Enix	233	E10+
Drawn to Life: SpongeBob Squarepants Edition	7.0	THQ	234	E
Dream Pinball 3D	N/A	Southpeak	228	E10+
Drone Tactics	7.0	Atlus	229	E10+
Dungeon Explorer: Warriors of Ancient Arts	6.5	Hudson	226	T
Etrian Odyssey II: Heroes of Lagaard	8.5	Atlus	230	E10+
Exit DS	7.5	Square Enix	234	E
Ferrari Challenge Trofeo Pirelli	6.0	System 3	233	E
Final Fantasy IV	9.0	Square Enix	231	E10+
• Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Ring of Fates	7.0	Square Enix	226	E10+
Final Fantasy Tactics A2: Grimoire of the Rift	7.0	Square Enix	230	E10+
Godzilla Unleashed: Double Smash	3.0	Atari	224	E
• GRID	8.5	Codemasters	230	E
Guitar Hero: On Tour	8.0	RedOctane	232	E10+
Harvest Moon DS Cute	7.5	Natsume	226	E
Harvest Moon: Island of Happiness	7.0	Natsume	231	E
Homie Rollerz	N/A	Destineer	226	E
The Incredible Hulk	7.5	Sega	231	E10+
Indy 500 Legends	N/A	Destineer	224	E
Insecticide	6.5	Gamecock	226	E10+
Iron Man	5.0	Sega	229	E10+
Izuna 2: The Unemployed Ninja Returns	5.0	Atlus	232	T
Jackass: The Game	N/A	Red Mile Entertainment	225	T
Jake Hunter: Detective Chronicles	5.0	Aksys	229	T
Kirby Super Star Ultra	9.0	Nintendo	234	E
Kung Fu Panda	N/A	Activision	230	E10+
Left Brain, Right Brain	N/A	Majesco	224	E
The Legend of Kage 2	8.0	Square Enix	234	E10+
LEGO Batman: The Videogame	N/A	Warner Bros.	234	E10+
LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventures	7.5	LucasArts	230	E
Line Rider 2: Unbound	6.0	Inxile	234	E
Little League World Series Baseball 2008	N/A	Activision	232	E
Lock's Quest	7.0	THQ	234	E
Looney Tunes: Cartoon Conductor	6.5	Eidos	230	E
Lost in Blue 3	5.5	Konami	227	E10+
Madden NFL 09	N/A	Electronic Arts	232	E
• Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games	7.5	Sega	225	E
• Mega Man Star Force 2	7.0	Capcom	230	E
Miami Nights: Singles in the City	N/A	Ubisoft	225	T
Mister Slime	6.0	Southpeak	230	E

REVIEWER NOTES

HELL'S KITCHEN (Wii)

As a fan of the TV show, I was hesitantly excited about Ubisoft's Hell's Kitchen video game. I wasn't expecting gaming greatness, but I ended up feeling slightly disappointed with Hell's Kitchen's simplistic gameplay and overall repetitiveness, and the fact that the game as a whole doesn't really retain the feel of the show. Ultimately, you're better off playing Order Up! or Cooking Mama. –JUSTIN C.

SAM & MAX SEASON ONE

Despite its gameplay flaws and inconsistent writing, I found old-fashioned graphic adventure Sam & Max to be eminently likeable. Hopefully the game does well enough that subsequent seasons also come to Wii. –STEVE T.

NARUTO: CLASH OF NINJA REVOLUTION

Before I dug into Clash of Ninja Revolution 2 for the review, I went back and played the original Clash of Ninja Revolution again, and I was pleasantly surprised at how well it holds up. Even if the game isn't drastically different from its GameCube predecessors, it's nice to have a Wii-exclusive fighting game that's as enjoyable as this one. –JUSTIN C.

MLB 2K8 Fantasy All-Stars	6.5	2K Sports	228	E
The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor	N/A	Vivendi Games	231	T
MX vs. ATV Untamed	6.0	THQ	224	E
My Horse and Me	N/A	Atari	225	E
Myst	5.0	Empire Interactive	227	E
Mystery Case Files: MillionHeir	6.5	Nintendo	234	E
Mystery Dungeon: Shiren the Wanderer	6.5	Sega	226	E
• N+	7.0	Atari	228	E
Nancy Drew: The Mystery of the Clue Bender Society	N/A	Majesco	232	E10+
• Nanostray 2	6.0	Majesco	225	E
Naruto: Ninja Destiny	7.0	Tomy/D3PA	226	T
• Naruto: Path of the Ninja 2	6.5	Tomy	234	E10+
• New International Track and Field	8.0	Konami	232	E10+
Ninja Gaiden: Dragon Sword	8.5	Tecmo	227	T
Ninja Reflex	N/A	Electronic Arts	227	E10+
Petz: Bunnyz	N/A	Ubisoft	227	E
Petz Wild Animals: Tigerz	N/A	Ubisoft	227	E
• Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Explorers of Darkness	7.5	Nintendo	229	E
• Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Explorers of Time	7.5	Nintendo	229	E
Pop Cutie! Street Fashion Simulation	6.0	Koei	233	E
Populous	7.0	XSEED	234	T
• Prey the Stars	5.5	Koei	234	E10
• Pro Evolution Soccer 2008	N/A	Konami	227	E
• Professor Layton and the Curious Village	8.5	Nintendo	225	E
Puchi Puchi Virus	7.0	NIS America	228	E
Puppy Palace	N/A	Ubisoft	225	E
• River King: Mystic Valley	7.0	Natsume	225	E
Rondo of Swords	6.5	Atlus	228	E10+
Sega Superstars Tennis	8.0	Sega	227	E
Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood	8.0	Sega	234	E
Soul Bubbles	6.5	Eidos	230	E
Space Chimps	N/A	Brash	231	E
Space Invaders Extreme	8.0	Square Enix	230	E
Speed Racer	N/A	Warner Bros. Interactive	229	E
Spore Creatures	8.0	Electronic Arts	234	E
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	6.0	LucasArts	233	T
Strawberry Shortcake: 4 Seasons Cake	N/A	Jack of All Games	224	E
Summon Night: Twin Age	7.5	Atlus	229	E10+
Super Dodgeball Brawlers	6.5	Aksys	229	E
Tamagotchi Connection: Corner Shop 3	N/A	Namco Bandai	230	E
Teenage Zombies: Invasion of the Alien Brain Thingys	7.0	Ignition	228	E10+
Time Hollow	7.0	Konami	234	T
Top Spin 3	6.0	2K Sports	229	E
Tornado	6.0	Ignition	234	E
Trauma Center: Under the Knife 2	8.5	Atlus	231	T
Unsolved Crimes	4.5	Empire	234	T
• Viva Piñata: Pocket Paradise	7.0	THQ	234	E
WALL*E	N/A	THQ	231	E
• Warhammer 40,000: Squad Command	8.0	THQ	224	T
Wordjong	N/A	Destineer	224	E
• The World Ends With You	9.0	Square Enix	228	T
• Yu-Gi-Oh! World Championship Tournament 2008	N/A	Konami	224	E
Zoo Tycoon 2 DS	7.0	THQ	226	E

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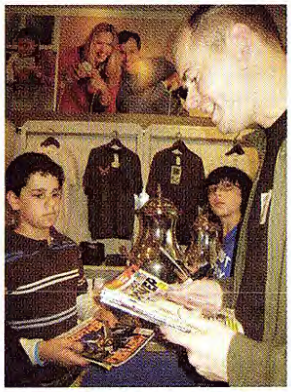
COMMUNITY

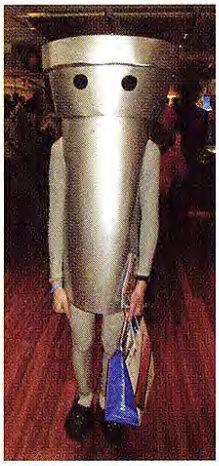
EVENTS

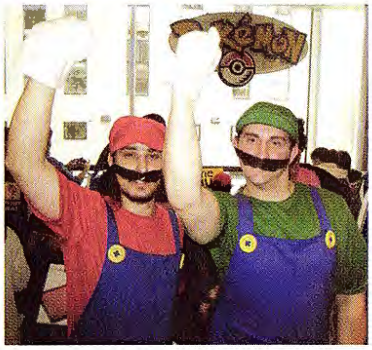
Birthday Bash

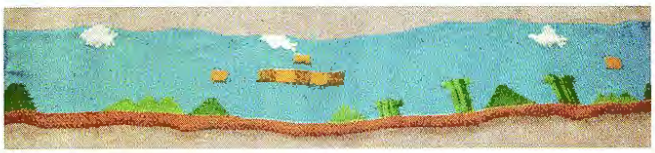
Thousands of readers joined us in celebrating 20 years of Nintendo Power.

From Texas to Ottawa, fans from all over North America gathered at the Nintendo World Store in New York to celebrate Nintendo Power's 20th anniversary. (Some readers camped out in line for up to four days!) For those who weren't able to attend, we took a lot of pictures of the event and of readers who participated in the costume contest. A good time was had by all, but we on the NP staff found it especially rewarding because we were able to meet so many Nintendo Power readers face-to-face. We have to give a big thanks to everyone who helped make Nintendo Power's 20th anniversary such a huge success—a winner is you! **—JUSTIN C.**









FANDOM

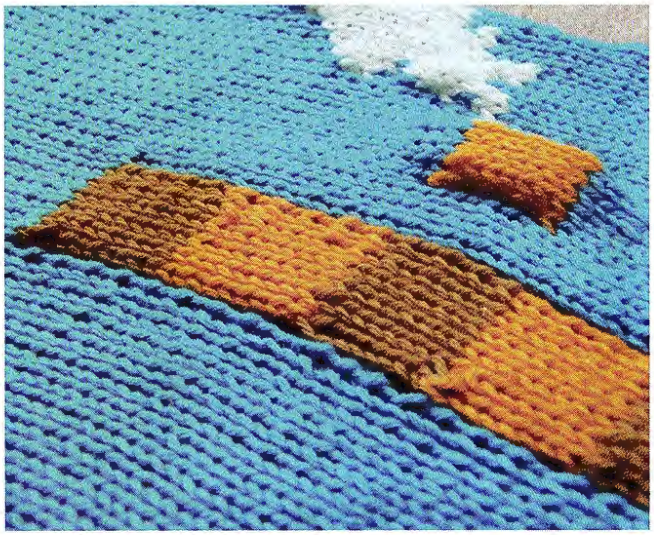
The Whole World around Your Neck

Scarves come in all sorts of shapes, sizes, patterns, and colors, but here's one scarf you won't find at your local mall. Dubbed simply "The Mario Scarf," the homemade garment is the handiwork of 23-year-old Cassie Smith, a substitute teacher from East Atlanta, Georgia. Smith estimates that she is one-third of the way done with the scarf (it was over six feet long at press time), which aims to re-create the entirety of World 1-1 from the classic NES platformer Super Mario Bros. in a wearable format.

The idea came from her boyfriend, Jason, who like Smith is a long-time gamer with an affinity for 8-bit classics. Smith began the massive undertaking last summer, utilizing a fan-made image of the entire level map as a template. Initially she attempted to use a grid-making Web application to map out the project, but instead opted to freehand the entire scarf. Smith knitted off and on for months while Jason temporarily relocated to California for a job, but when Jason returned home, he offered her a bit of extra motivation to complete the project. "He told me that if I could finish the scarf he would propose to me," says Smith. Marriage by way of Mario—now that's something we can get behind.

With about seven years of experience (she began knitting in high school), Smith considers herself an intermediate knitter, but says aside from the usual Internet hecklers, fan reaction to the scarf has been overwhelmingly positive. She's been blogging (http://themarioscarf.blogspot.com) about the project since July, and the goal is to be finished by Thanksgiving this year. The little details—such as the enemies and Mario himself—will be the last bits added.

While she's open to knitting other game-inspired items, World 1-1 will likely be Smith's only Super Mario Bros. level scarf, as she believes crafting additional worlds would diminish the thrill and originality of the initial project. And what will become of the completed scarf? "There is talk of hanging it like a tapestry in Jason's game room, and I'm sure he'll attempt to wear it," says Smith. "The one thing we absolutely will not do is sell it. Unless [Mario creator] Shigeru Miyamoto requests it for his personal collection, we're not giving this up." —ANDREW H.



ABOVE *and* BEYOND

Got art, cosplay, case mods, etc.? Send them to us via email to **community@nintendopower.com** or via snail mail to Nintendo Power/Community c/o Future US, 1000 Marina Blvd., Suite 510, Brisbane, CA 94005. We'll run the best stuff in this section.

WRITE YOUR OWN CAPTION

Screen Test

We went old-school with Volume 233's King of the Monsters screenshot, and you readers responded with some creative captions that you can check out below. This time around, we're going to a galaxy far, far away, even if the denizens of that galaxy seem to be caught in an unending war among the stars. Send your best star- or war-related captions to **screentest@nintendopower.com.**

THIS MONTH'S SHOT

One of the major problems with hanging out with a Wookiee? Static electricity.

HERE'S OUR CAPTION. Think you can do better?

VOLUME 233'S SHOT

"Despite his best attempts at a final smash, Godzilla never made the cut into Super Smash Bros. Brawl." —CWK129

"Galactus's plans to devour the Earth were quickly thwarted by an unlikely hero." —TRAVIS B.

"When I throw you up onto that skyscraper this time, don't come back down without the frisbee!" —REBECCA

"Their inverted swan lift earned a 9.20 from the P1 judge, but they were completely snubbed by P2 as the pair had just destroyed his apartment building." —JAMES E.

NEXT MONTH

The incomparable Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time turns 10 in November, and we'll celebrate this momentous event with Zelda series producer Eiji Aonuma. Plus, loads of new games from Tokyo Game Show!

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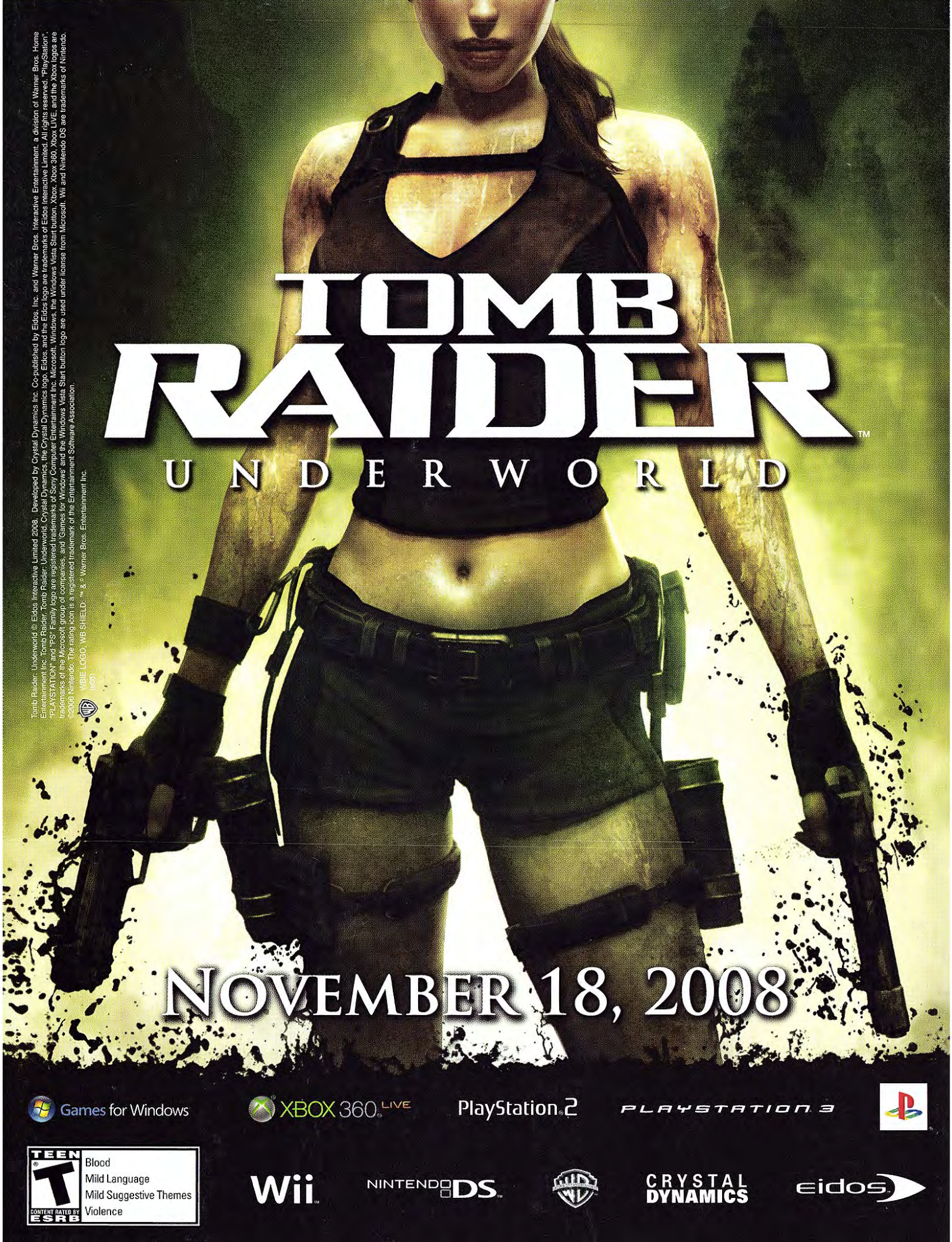
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